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**Lions of Marjah**  
**Why Marjah's Militia Combats Violent Extremists**

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**Lions of Marjah**  
***Why Marjah's Militia Combats Violent Extremists***

For the degree of PhD by  
Howard Gambrill Clark

1 August 2014

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## **Abstract**

This study uncovers the motivations of the indigenous counter-violent-extremist movement in Marjah, a village in southwest Afghanistan, between 2009 and 2013. Furthermore, it elucidates how the international and central government security forces allowed and enabled this grassroots anti-Taliban militia.

The thesis submits that the fighters rose up and defeated Taliban because of self-determination—describing the townsmen’s ultimate goal of village autonomy as well as their self-sufficient actions. Self-determination acted as a centre of gravity that drove fighters to struggle and die to eradicate local violent extremist elements. The Afghan government and outside militaries allowed this independence, unlike the Taliban, and thus became the militia’s welcome partners instead of enemies.

After introducing the history of traditional Pashtun militias in southern Afghanistan and then in Marjah specifically, the paper tests three hypotheses: whether and how much the 1) need for stability, 2) antipathy towards a foreign ideology, and 3) protection of tribalism may have factored into the motivations for this movement.

From interviews with over a quarter of the civilian guardians in 2011, unpublished unclassified and declassified reports, and notes from observers, this study assesses that stability, hatred of an alien ideology, and nationalism—not tribalism—were rallying cries for the movement. However, self-determination, not originally postulated before field research, served as the central theme underpinning these other drivers and acting as the main master narrative.

The findings of this single case study may be an early look at a burgeoning discipline in counterinsurgency and stability operations investigating similar movements worldwide.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Twelve years after the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and United States' consequential invasion of Afghanistan, there has yet to be an in-depth study on the motivations of those civilians who revolt against violent extremists. Even though in the years after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks the United States and some of her partner nations found themselves mired in a war in Iraq and a menu of contingency, intelligence support, logistical support, foreign-internal-defence, low-intensity, stabilization, or counterterrorism missions from the Philippines to Mali,<sup>1</sup> there is no academic study that investigates the drivers of indigenous movements that fight and kill violent extremists on their own.

This case study's research and analysis endeavour to illuminate incentives and goals—in the form of words and actions—of a single self-driven counter-extremist local militia in the village of Marjah in southwest Afghanistan between 2009 and 2013. However, the findings of this single case study may be a first-look at a burgeoning discipline in counterinsurgency studies that will help future scholars to identify such movements and understand what motivates and sustains them throughout the world. The story of Marjah's grassroots counter-violent-extremist movement offers one case study to include in wider comparative research, and the conclusions may elucidate themes common to and different from investigations of other similar militias. Also, the methodology, which included an intensive and wide interview scheme with the anti-extremist fighters, may help to inform approaches of future similar case studies. The conclusions, though, of this study derive only from Marjah in a four-year period.

The findings of this single case study and future comparative investigations may also help policymakers identify and leverage such movements in the current constricted manpower environment.<sup>2</sup> Because of U.S. military and civilian government service sequesters, drawdowns, and budget cuts,<sup>3</sup> the U.S. government may look to tactics that leverage indigenous anti-militant activities for the foreseeable future. Military commanders have already begun to publish strategy papers that call for NATO security forces to identify and empower local systems.<sup>4</sup>

Because movements and their motivations do not occur in a vacuum, this study must also analyse the doctrine and intentions of outside actors—such as NATO security services in Marjah—and what actions they took to impel or simply allow such an autonomous movement to begin and then flourish. This study is therefore a story of both the motivations of local actors and the tradecraft, accidental or intentional, foreign actors employed to enable Marjah's militia.

The primary ***research question*** is what drives an indigenous counter-violent extremist movement? Put another way, why would people fight and die to kill violent extremists? This inquiry calls for a thorough understanding of the local and regional conditions, characteristics, actions, aspirations, verbal narratives, and the myriad of historical factors that could lead someone to voluntarily kill in the name of eradicating violent extremism. Sub-questions, thus, include what were the initial conditions—with regards to security, economy, previous interactions with violent extremists, and geography—for this successful grassroots kinetic movement? Furthermore what are the conditions, mindset, and strategy of outside military forces—both the international Coalition Forces and the Afghan formal security services—to help such a movement rise in the first place? What messages do the fighters and leaders espouse; what claimed motivations and goals characterize the movement? In line with or in contrast to the verbal messages, what actions define the movement, and what motivations do these activities reveal? Finally, what are the regional socio-political conditions that allow such a movement to continue to fight in the long-term and see success against its perceived enemies?

This study concludes that self-determination served as this movement's centre of gravity. Autonomy aptly describes both members' independent actions and the goal for which they struggled. This anti-Taliban Pashtun militia or *arbakai*<sup>5</sup> is somewhat unique amongst similar movements in southwest Asia—many of whom failed to live or act with autonomy, self-sufficiency, or resolve. While other would-be movements negotiated with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for wages, haggled for development projects, and made empty promises,<sup>6</sup> Marjah's *arbakai* prided itself in its self-sufficiency and independent vision.<sup>7</sup> Militiamen felt they alone would have to defeat

insurgents<sup>8</sup>—perhaps a dramatic notion but an accurate one as Marjahns knew well that outside security assistance would decrease or end.<sup>9</sup> They felt their future was in their own hands. Locals did not wish to count on ISAF, GIRoA, or any outside entity. Marjah militiamen needed no incentive, no treaty, and no special recognition.<sup>10</sup> As an anti-Taliban tribal elder stated, “I don’t need a tank, I don’t need a plan, I don’t even need a single bullet...I will use sticks and I will use the guns my people have to defend my area.”<sup>11</sup>

This study’s *thesis* is that Marjah’s militia successfully defeats violent extremists because of uncompromising self-determination. Self-determination, in this study, comprises three related and overlapping elements: decision by a people to determine their own political and social fate;<sup>12</sup> the ability and willingness of a person or group to act without external influence or rule;<sup>13</sup> and communal acts of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.<sup>14</sup> In essence, self-determination applies to the goal of autonomy and the acts, themselves, of working without outside interference. This motivation kept the fighters fighting in the streets to face looming grisly retribution at the hands of the Taliban,<sup>15</sup> often without money and basic policing resources.<sup>16</sup> Autonomy—regarding both their spoken aspirations and the independent method by which they fought—served as a centre of gravity and saturated their answers to the study’s interviews, their idealism, and their aggressive crusading spirit.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, for Coalition Forces and the Afghan government, Marjah’s drive for autonomy and self-reliance neither contradicts ISAF goals nor GIRoA laws.<sup>18</sup> Thus government officials and international security leaders were able to allow this *arbakai* to operate and consequently helped to ensure an effective native counterinsurgent paramilitary unit.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.1 Definitions

Before uncovering the specific motivations of this militia, defining the terms “Taliban,” “violent extremists,” and “*arbakai*” is essential. These sometime contentious terms comprise the protagonists and antagonists of the fight for Marjah. Although government representatives have insinuated that the Afghan Taliban are “terrorists”<sup>20</sup> and dubbed its Pakistan-based sister organization Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan a formal “terrorist” group,<sup>21</sup> this particular case study will not use the term. The words “terrorism” and “terrorist” are subjective—depending on the perspective of



those who feel they are terrorized or threatened by governments or non-governmental entities that may employ certain types of violence.<sup>22</sup> Instead of abiding by governments' terminology, this study will look at the Taliban holistically, to include its structure, strategies, ideologies, and roots and not through the eyes of policymakers. The study will analyse an indigenous force that kinetically and rhetorically counters a local violent extremist element that the villagers refer to as Taliban.

When researching a movement that fights violent extremists, one must first define the enemy—the very reason such a movement exists in the first place. Literature describes three lenses through which to view the ***Taliban***. One lens contends the Taliban has a tendency towards being an independent monolithic group—or at least close coalition of groups—derived from a single ideology. Another describes Taliban as most notably a self-claimed front of a greater war to defend all Muslim lands from outside invaders. A third views the Taliban has an inclination more towards a loose coalition of insurgent cells with disparate motivations and beliefs sharing only a common anti-government narrative.<sup>23</sup> On a linguistic note, this study will use the term Taliban to refer to the organization and the same derivative of the word to refer to a group or two or more members of the group.

Within the first lens, scholars such as Scott Atran and Seth Jones contend that the main core Taliban comprise people who adhere to a strict version of a “true” religion that is incompatible with every other interpretation of God. They consider themselves clearly separate from any other major political sect, school of faith, or school of law—they recognize no other type of religion as valid.<sup>24</sup> The Taliban do not even recognize other violent, political, or fundamentalist streams of Islam to include the Saudi faith or “bin Ladinism.”<sup>25</sup> Such a monolithic faith—as taught in these schools—holds zero room for tolerance, debate, or anything that might appear on the surface to be against the oneness of God. Afghanistan's mysticism, gravesites, shrines, mujahidin warrior charismatics, tribal elders, and tribal land owners hold no place in the Taliban's envisioned new world order of adherence to Taliban's view above all else.<sup>26</sup>

According to this school of thought, the Taliban ideology is as an interpretation of the original Deobandi movement. The Deobandis—from the relatively “moderate”

Hanafi school of law—originally rose up in India as a peaceful movement under British rule.<sup>27</sup> By 1988, a new breed of more violent leaning 25,000 informal and unregistered Deobandi schools were blooming, most of which comprised teachers with little or no formal education and arguably little understanding of the original Deobandi ideology.<sup>28</sup> These teachers, who flourished in rural areas and Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, taught what they believed were literalist views of the Quran, even though few instructors actually studied the Quran critically.<sup>29</sup> When the Taliban became relevant in southern Afghanistan in 1994, it was to this mutated quasi-Deobandi ideology to which founders and followers adhered.<sup>30</sup>

Those Pakistani schools did more than just teach ideology to the Taliban. They supplied the Taliban with fighters and leaders.<sup>31</sup> By 1999 eight of the top Taliban leadership were graduates of the extremist Deobandi school in the Northwest Frontier Province Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqani. Whenever the Taliban needed more bodies throughout the late 1990s, schools would shut down and instruct students to walk or drive to Afghanistan to join Taliban ranks.<sup>32</sup>

A second school of thought to include findings from Robert Pape and Jerrold Post supposes that the Taliban is most notably but one front of a greater war to defend lands where Muslims live against Western presence and influence. This line of argument stresses that, although the Taliban's faith and ideology are unique to any major strand of Islam, their regional messaging campaigns; local recruitment statements of fighting off Western incursion;<sup>33</sup> acceptance of non-Deobandi local and foreign fighters; inclusion of younger globally focused recruits; and past rhetorical, militant, and monetary support of al-Qa`ida are possible evidence that effectively the Taliban act as but one face of global violent extremism.<sup>34</sup> Taliban online statements stress that Afghanistan is but just one front in a worldwide campaign to push Westerners out of Muslim lands,<sup>35</sup> a few Taliban sub-commanders claim to be part of al-Qa`ida central,<sup>36</sup> and there is limited evidence to suggest that young Taliban recruits appear to be more interested in al-Qa`ida's worldwide vision and reach vice regional Deobandi goals.<sup>37</sup> This distinct viewpoint on the Taliban identity does not perceive Taliban's contemporary Deobandi belief system as the same as other regional and transnational insurrections but instead emphasizes Taliban's global ambitions as jibing with these other violent organizations.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps one reason for the idea that the Taliban are one front in a worldwide battle is rooted in history. Historically, al-Qa`ida's ideological roots may have influenced Taliban's views. Shaikh Syed Abul A'ala Mawdudi's version of Muslim Brothers (founded in 1941, 13 years after the birth of Egypt's original Muslim Brotherhood franchise) was heavily influenced by the works and views of Egypt's Brethren founder Hasan al-Banna. Al-Banna's views led to a growing Egyptian Brotherhood that, when repressed, grew extremist violent branches to include the Egyptian Islamic Jihad whose members later comprised much of al-Qa`ida's top leadership save a few such as Saudi-born Usama bin Ladin.<sup>39</sup> When Usama bin Ladin and his Egyptian inner circle searched for safe haven, the Taliban obliged ultimately leading to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Some experts believe the Taliban would have eventually excommunicated al-Qa`ida leadership on their own, and some contend that the relationship between al-Qa`ida and the Taliban up until 2001 was mired with distrust.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the Taliban successfully sheltered al-Qa`ida and often market and message as if they are all partners on a similar mission.<sup>41</sup>

A third view, which includes contributions from Jessica Stern and Tom Coghlan, argues that the Taliban often have a tendency towards a loose coalition of fighting cells in Afghanistan that appear only to agree on opposing international security forces and the current government of Afghanistan. Taliban is an umbrella group that appears to comprise disparate goals and ideologies.<sup>42</sup> This stream of academic thought often refers to dozens or hundreds of cells of violent extremists<sup>43</sup>—some that Taliban political centres in Pakistan control and others that local leaders control.<sup>44</sup> Some appear spiritual, some criminal, and some political. Some Taliban cell leaders have become drug warlords,<sup>45</sup> while others appear to use membership in the Taliban to continue centuries of power plays against rival clans and tribal confederations.<sup>46</sup> While there exist dedicated cells willing to conduct suicide attacks, there are others that comprise relatively moderate tribesmen from locations where non-violent-extremist elders wish to volunteer some fighters to the Taliban as a method to appease Taliban militant leaders.<sup>47</sup> Some allow schools for girls,<sup>48</sup> while others regularly intimidate and assassinate teachers and oppose women's education.<sup>49</sup> Although some balk at tribalism, others provide services peacefully through the local tribal *jirga*<sup>50</sup>—a special decision making council of tribal elders—systems to be locally and culturally

appropriate.<sup>51</sup> Some Taliban cells continue to cut off the heads of civilians who work with Coalition Forces,<sup>52</sup> while other cells refrain from this type of brutality as per Mullah Omar's recent guidance for a less violent population-focused approach to insurgency.<sup>53</sup> Despite their differences, these disparate cells have one commonality: opposition to the current Afghan government and NATO presence.<sup>54</sup>

This study will marry all three lenses, which, though distinct, are not mutually exclusive. The intense debates in literature highlight that the Taliban is a complex identity demanding nuanced understanding when any researcher studies Afghanistan and counterinsurgency in southwest Asia. The Taliban have their roots in a single Deobandi-branch ideology. The core leadership and recruits continue to come from these schools with an understanding that their belief system is the only valid ideology. Simultaneously, the Taliban—in their marketing, attempts to recruit regionally, and attempts to raise money—also paint themselves as one front in a grander war against the West. Such a narrative allows the Taliban to maintain its unique identity while selling themselves as part of a grander fight with groups that hold different ideologies but similar goals and tactics. Finally, the Taliban—an ideologically independent identity simultaneously marketing themselves as part of a global war—also bring in short-term non-ideological allies in Afghanistan. Although some scholars may not consider these non-ideological partners true hard-core “Taliban,” this study will apply the term to all fighters under the banner of “Taliban.” As with any movement, there are complexities, various shades of devotion, and marriages of convenience within the movement. It is paramount that scholarship be as intellectually rigorous as possible to accept and grapple with the distinct yet not mutually exclusive identities of the Taliban.

Even though it embodies unique and complex qualities, the Taliban is just one group within a stream of fighters throughout the world that some analysts and policy makers dub as *violent extremists*.<sup>55</sup> This term is inherently subjective and riddled with etymological and substantive problems. In the eyes of Taliban, NATO troops may be seen as violent extremists when this coalition of foreign armies aggressively conduct attacks and sometimes kill civilians. Similarly, a scholar could also apply this term to any number of corrupt officials, criminals, other foreign militaries, or entities that use violence and hold “fringe” beliefs. So the assumption will be made that the term

violent extremist will be from the perspective of GIRoA, ISAF, and anti-insurgent Afghans.

To sharpen the definition further, one must grapple with two perspectives on violent extremism. A first school of thought, including M.A. Muqtedar Khan and Donald Holbrook,<sup>56</sup> supposes that violent extremists incorporate not only those that actively conduct violence but also refer to political and philosophical leaders who may support fringe conservative beliefs or act possibly as some sort of stepping stone for those that eventually become violent extremists. These authors suppose that political Islam, that is anything short of accepting modern Western and democratic “values,” can be associated with violent extremism.<sup>57</sup> However, there exists little evidence that political Islam is the only or even a necessary road to radicalization. In fact, most literature on radicalization agrees that there are likely many varied paths for people to become violent extremists.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, some experts have peeled through the various layers of constructionist and orthodox *salafism*—from “quietist” (those that submit to a political leader), “scientific” (non-violent believers who also investigate and incorporate non-religious scholarship) to non-violent “political” strains—and concluded independently that the “jihadi” violent extremism is actually at odds with the non-violent strands of conservative belief systems.<sup>59</sup> Although these non-violent salafi streams may sometimes have connections and hold ideological origins for a particular violent extremist, salafis themselves are not necessarily violent.

A second stream of literature argues that violent extremists are only those that actually conduct violent attacks. This limited view, from publications from such authors as John Horgan,<sup>60</sup> mostly discounts rhetorical supporters and those with violent-extremist-leaning views. A violent extremist is specifically only someone who has actually already conducted or is in the process of conducting violence against him or herself or another human being for a political or ideological goal.<sup>61</sup> This narrow definition does not refer to someone with “fringe” beliefs or a person that supports violence morally or rhetorically. Within this stream of thought, the act of someone joining a violent extremist group and conducting violent operations can be considered “activation” or “mobilization” because the definition focuses on actions and not as much as the original motivation, ideology, belief, or grievance.<sup>62</sup>

Within this second school of thought exist two distinct approaches to study violent extremism and to analyse the mobilization of a person into a violent extremist group. The first approach calls for practitioners and scholars to focus on the actual actions of violent extremists and the road to violent extremism foremost with less of an emphasis on understanding original belief systems, related non-violent movements, social trends, and the greater political and ideological dispositions in which the violent extremist lives and acts. This approach may assume that distinctly different violent extremist groups' behaviour can be compared with little focus on possible ideological roots and the greater environment.<sup>63</sup> Another approach strives to holistically investigate not only the actions themselves of violent extremists but also the political, ideological, and personal mindsets taking into account trends and narratives of the region and world.<sup>64</sup>

Because there is no evidence violent extremists only derive from peaceful conservatism, this study will wholly discount the definition that includes those with orthodox beliefs. Violent extremists must act violently to reach this paper's definition of violent extremist. It is also not enough for someone to hold conservative or fringe spiritual interpretations. Therefore, violent extremists in Afghanistan would include those persons who conduct suicide bombings, execute civilians wantonly, and violently force locals to adhere to particular belief systems or political views—in Afghanistan including members of al-Qa`ida, Taliban, Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, and the Haqqani Network for example.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, this paper will also investigate the political and ideological origins of violent extremists as well as the larger security and political picture. It must be noted that in recent years, some violent extremists in southwest Asia and throughout the world have taken lighter approaches by trying to avoid indigenous civilian deaths.<sup>66</sup> However, even these amongst these groups, to include Taliban cells throughout Helmand, violence against civilians continues to ebb and flow.<sup>67</sup>

Fighting these violent extremists, who brought their beliefs, world-views, narratives, and ruthless tactics to Marjah is an *arbakai*. The Pashtun militia members in Marjah call themselves *arbakai*, and this study will refer to them as *arbakai*. However, the uprising in Marjah is by no means a traditional or normal Pashtun *arbakai*. There are four major interpretations of what the Marjah militia actually is within the paradigms

of both the international counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan and within Pashtun history. On a linguistic note, this study will use the term *arbakai* for the singular and plural.

First, foreign scholars often refer to the militia by the ISAF funding source that conventional and Special Forces use to encourage militias to operate. In Marjah, ISAF sanctioned what was known as “Local Defense Forces” (September 2010), later known as a “Neighborhood Watch Program” (November 2010), later known as the “Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure” (February 2011), later known as “Afghan Local Police” (August 2011).<sup>68</sup> However, as the study will show, solely calling the *arbakai* by the Western terms overlooks the unique nature of this militia which rose up on its own; operates on its own often without salary or outside incentive or support; and maintains that it will continue to function exactly as it has during and after any miniscule ISAF funding.

Second, some consider the Marjah militia an *arbakai* only. According to Pashtun tradition, an *arbakai* is purely a community police force that enforces *jirga*<sup>69</sup> decisions and aims to prevent harm to the community. These non-professional civilian soldiers number from ten to over 100, often negotiate instead of fight, and are often unarmed because of the inherent respect locals may have for the *jirga*.<sup>70</sup> Like a traditional *arbakai*, Marjah’s militia was born from a traditional *jirga* decision, and the militia members continue to answer to the *jirga* even today. Additionally, the militia does defend the village block-by-block like a traditional *arbakai*. However, simply dubbing this militia a classic *arbakai* ignores the at-times offensive nature of this militia (stepping outside the village to hunt down Taliban) and the modest ISAF salaries that sometimes go to the fighters—salaries unnecessary for a classic Pashtun *arbakai*. Also, the militia has continued to fight for so long that it does not fit easily into scholars’ understanding of a historical *arbakai*, which traditionally execute a single action temporarily and then disband. If one were to consider this militia an *arbakai*, one would have to acknowledge that this is not a traditional *arbakai* but a modern version of a historical Pashtun term.

Third, some might describe this militia as a *chagha*<sup>71</sup>, which refers to fighters raised suddenly to meet a specific set of invaders.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the media has referred to anti-Taliban militias like the one in Marjah as a *qiyam* or uprising. Although these

terms aptly describe the initial uprising in Marjah, the terms do not holistically take into account the militia's longevity. The militia, as the study will show, not only helped to push the Taliban out of the village but continue to defend the village year-after-year from future incursion.

Finally, some research and media outlets have referred to this type of militia as a Pashtun *lashkar*.<sup>73</sup> Some regional government officials and local media outlets maintain that government sanctioned anti-Taliban lashkars are only supposed to defend their home villages and provide regular military troops information on locations and dispositions of anti-government militants.<sup>74</sup> However, most Western scholars on tribalism in Pashtun areas disagree with these claims. Overwhelming careful research shows that traditional Pashtun lashkars are most often offensive forces ranging from 10 to 50,000 and can implement jihad or even offensive anti-government activities and operations.<sup>75</sup> Lashkars are often mobile small armies that travel to close in with and destroy an enemy.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the term *lashkar* would also fall short to wholly define Marjah's mostly defensive militia. The militia is mostly protective force with only some offensive capabilities—not the attacking tribal army that a *lashkar* normally describes.

Although no one term correctly defines the movement in Marjah, *arbakai*—with the caveat that this is not a classic historical *arbakai* but instead a modern iteration with some offensive characteristics—is the most appropriate. ISAF terms fail to acknowledge the independent and self-sufficient nature of the movement. Chagha fails to account for the militia's longevity, and *lashkar* fails to account for its mostly defensive nature.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

Contemporary southern Afghanistan *arbakai* in their self-driven efforts against violent extremists is understudied within the disciplines of counterinsurgency and stabilization.<sup>77</sup> Within the burgeoning literature on stabilization theories—whether those that focus on direct outside intervention or those that see such processes as destabilizing—and historical understanding of rural Afghan resilience, there is yet no rigorous in-depth study on why rural Afghans would rise up against contemporary violent extremists specifically. Moreover there is no study, yet, that attempts to research the motivations, characteristics, and conditions of a movement while that



uprising is underway along with the personalities, narratives, perspectives, and aspirations during warfare.

Most historians and war studies theorists focus generally on how a local government or outside military can directly defeat insurrection and help to strengthen stability at the expense of focusing primarily on the motivations of local civilian movements whose goals are in consonance with the greater counterinsurgency campaign.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, authors do account for local irregular militia forces but normally as a corollary to outside or central government militaries recruiting and paying civilians to conduct basic civil-police work under formal security command.<sup>79</sup>

On a strategic and tactical level, this literature review reveals two competing theories of counterinsurgency. The first focuses on the existence and number of localized paramilitary forces—that are recruited by outsiders—for a counterinsurgency to prevail with the assumption that such civilian guardian forces are but one part of a larger campaign against insurrection.<sup>80</sup> The second theme suggests a lower counterinsurgency footprint<sup>81</sup> that necessarily entails enabling local resilient elements such as Pashtun *arbakai* as a main effort. In short, there is a divide amongst experts between a large and more modest outside military and central government presence—militias play an auxiliary role in the former and more central role in the latter. This theoretical division played out on the ground in Marjah. While military doctrine relied on the heavier approach with less emphasis on natural clans,<sup>82</sup> the NATO commanders and Afghan officials in and around Marjah elected a lighter footprint with more investment on enabling local actors.<sup>83</sup>

On the policy level debate remains on whether or not governments should work with clan militias at all. Those against promoting tribalism see the phenomenon as destabilizing and antithetical to Western ideals of protecting and valuing the individual as well as weakening central government power.<sup>84</sup> Others view working with clan elders as a pragmatic solution to countering violent extremists in rural areas where bloodline and geography tie traditional communities together.<sup>85</sup> This second group believes that the alternative to not working with tribes is to face the possibility of clan uprising against any outside presence.

### 1.2.1 Anti-Tribalism—Policy Implications

Those counterinsurgency and legal experts who emphasize the downsides of working with tribes, focus first on a supposed regression from liberal values inherent with clan-ism—of which *arbakai* can be an essential element for rural Pashtuns. Robert Kagan and Mark Weiner maintain that Western liberal government institutions are not the natural state of mankind, but instead something that must be enforced to protect individual freedom and protection.<sup>86</sup> Without strong central governments, tribalism becomes the norm. Legal scholar Dr. Weiner, when discussing policy implications of bypassing tribal leadership, defines liberal institutions as those that, “...place a central value on individual freedom and self-development.”<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, “rule of the clan...[is] oriented primarily toward kinship...” wherein “individuals are submerged within the essential social groups to which they belong...”<sup>88</sup>

One dynamic example of the implications of tribal rule versus liberal governance is the difference between shame and guilt. Under liberal governments, guilt refers to what an individual might feel personally. This feeling does not necessarily lead the individual to become a pariah from his or her community. In contrast, shame plays a central role in clan societies, as Weiner explains. If someone does something that is considered against cultural norms, then that person risks bringing shame on his community and being punished or expelled.<sup>89</sup> In summary, this school of thought believes that a liberal government values the individual while clans emphasize communal identity above any one member—liberal governance being the ideal.

Researchers, who underline the disadvantages of promoting tribalism, also view clan-ism as a direct challenge to the strength and viability of a central government. They interpret governance as a zero-sum game in which the more power tribes have, the less a federal formal government has and vice versa. Clan systems tend to emerge or reinstitute themselves when central states become weak—leading, in turn, perhaps to an even more weakened ability of the central government to be able to have the potential to provide individuals protections and freedoms.<sup>90</sup> As Dr. Weiner writes:

*The most probable outcome of a radically diminished state is thus neither a collection of empowered*

*individuals liberated from the constraints of government nor a grand community of equality and solidarity. Rather, it is a riven, fractured, unequal world in which both individuals and the larger public are sacrificed to the needs of clans of all sorts.*<sup>91</sup>

Clans lessen any central formal government—a single state authority that could otherwise protect individuals equally under one set of federal or provincial laws.<sup>92</sup> Promoting tribes and their militias, specifically, takes away the ability of a central government to monopolize laws and the methods and abilities to enforce these rules. Tribes have the power to punish their people according to their own interpretations of norms. They also have their own laws and institutionalized disciplinary methods.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, clan-ism can be destabilizing, according to some authors. Sammuel Griffith and John Nagl maintain that one single government is preferable to many smaller governance systems—an overall situation that could lead an insurgency to take over lesser powers bit-by-bit as happened in Mao’s revolution in which disunity of national governance was one political characteristic that may have eventually allowed the communists success in China.<sup>94</sup> As well, the rule of the clan can, in general, lead to continuous low-intensity localized instability and conflict—because the rule hinges on feuds or the threat of feuds.<sup>95</sup> For example, in Pashtun rural areas, *badal* is valued—a required physical punishment for some actual or perceived slight.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, tribalism and a weakened federal state may bring about side effects of vigilantes, criminal organizations, cartels, and militant movements.<sup>97</sup>

Concerning the first argument of tribalism as a threat to liberal Western protection of the individual, these authors appear to be making a value judgment on how humankind should evolve socially and politically. A government’s policy could very well be to grow liberal governance worldwide. On the other hand, if a government’s grand strategy is to protect its own Western ideals of valuing each citizen in its own country, then perhaps that government may wish for more pragmatic pro-tribal stances abroad in order to protect the institutions within its borders. Nevertheless, pro-tribal policies could indeed theoretically create a dangerous precedent in the long term. If the U.S. government bypasses formal governments for tribal elders, then this could notionally build a model by which foreign governments bypass Washington,

DC to deal directly with family lineages of Appalachia, native tribes on and off reservations, and bloodline cartels of the Ozarks (perhaps in an effort to divide arguably already under-served populations from federal power). For Afghanistan, however, this becomes a moot point because Afghan law explicitly give tribes and tribal militias authorities and responsibilities.<sup>98</sup> So, the U.S. government and ISAF are not bypassing officials but instead respecting formal law when dealing with Afghan clans.

On the second argument of tribes and their militias weakening the central state, the second half of this literature review will reveal how in some areas governments actually become weaker when they become unwanted presence in clan-ruled areas. Anti-clan strategies in some areas may actually bring about instability if the tribes revolt against central government intrusion. Even dictatorial regimes such as that under Saddam Hussein (during the years 1992-2003, between the post-Operation-Desert-Storm Shi'a and Kurdish uprising and the U.S. invasion) have actually counted on supporting carefully selected tribes in order to keep the government alive and safe—offering Saddam a security buffer in desert regions. However, to be fair, researchers such as Dr. Weiner and Dr. Nagl do not outright ask readers to ignore tribes. Instead, they underline the need to understand tribal areas—they suggest acknowledging them as the United States moves towards its own goals, which they believe should be to lessen clan influence.<sup>99</sup>

The third argument on tribalism bringing about instability has no basis. Although scholars point to the civil war of the 1990s as an unstable period, this was primarily a civil war between non-tribal militias run by warlords that rose amidst the earlier Soviet anti-tribal policies. Many scholars actually maintain that low-intensity fighting between and within tribes is actually a stabilizing cycle that allows for greater peace. Agricultural and herding cycles allow tribes to be peaceful during busy seasons when clans are trying to sustain themselves for the upcoming winter. Then, during dormant months, inter and intra-tribal fighting is more common. This fighting and vengeance seeking is such a part of life that the original cause is often forgotten, and conflicts can still spring up years or decades after an initial spark. Intra-tribal conflict, Louis Dupree writes, is most often fought over women, property rights, and inheritance. And all tribe and clans have a vested interest in the conflict being over or on hiatus

when the agricultural and herding seasons begin again each year.<sup>100</sup> Although this fighting may seem unstable to Western eyes, it may very well be considered stable for Pashtuns living well outside the reach of Kabul. In addition, any disruption to this cycle by non-tribal warring factions, invading army, or a new government—a disturbance that does not allow tribesmen to tend to their farms between battles—may spark resented instability.

### **1.2.2 Anti-Tribalism—Strategic Implications**

Not working by, with, and through tribes as a primary policy has strategic and tactic implications. The policy translates into an approach that, in rural Afghanistan, demands many weapons, funds, and troops<sup>101</sup> to grow a new government and undermine tribal leadership—leading perhaps to the government fighting both an insurgency and tribes that are not apart of the Taliban. According to David Galula, the goal of counterinsurgency is to establish legitimate authority directly over citizens.<sup>102</sup> Means to establish complete power over a people, according to Galula, can include providing each person with a formal national identification card, entering each citizen into a national registry, providing booklets about the government for each household, instituting curfews, and disallowing some people from leaving a town for more than a day.<sup>103</sup> Such a goal assumes control of a central government as taking precedence over tribal power—tribal power being a phenomenon that diminishes a federal government’s absolute power and the ability to win a zero sum game in which both the insurgency and the counterinsurgency vie to shore up support.

With regards to militias, the more widely read Western counterinsurgency historians and theorists touch on the need for enough numbers of counterinsurgent forces to be able to successfully compete with or defeat insurgents.<sup>104</sup> Some studies of successful counterinsurgency campaigns even estimate—depending on the efficacy of counter-guerrilla forces,<sup>105</sup> strength of enemies, and overall circumstances—roughly 20 security personnel are necessary for every 1,000 civilians to defeat an insurgency.<sup>106</sup> In the case of modern Afghanistan, such a theory would mean about 660,000 security troops for the 33 million strong Afghan civilian population.<sup>107</sup> Such a number would demand troops beyond the capacity of the official national authority. So where would one go to fill the void between the current ranks of official military and police and any

“magic” counterinsurgency number? Twentieth century counterinsurgency scholar and practitioner David Galula as well as a number of twenty-first century researchers to include David Kilcullen and Seth Jones looked to untrained locals not formally part of a central government<sup>108</sup> to bolster security personnel with what one could define as indigenous paramilitary units and auxiliary local police.<sup>109</sup> It is important to note that they are speaking about ancillary neighbourhood watch forces—that the government or outside military raises—not leveraging tribes that naturally rise up. The very idea of recruiting and creating artificial militias undermines natural the systems of indigenous clans.

Such programs in counterinsurgency—beyond just filling a security force-citizen ratio—offer a number of other potential benefits, even if militias are not naturally born from tribes. First, typically formal government and military program managers intend local defence forces in counterinsurgency environments to be living biometric detectors capable of immediately identifying outsiders to their community. Second, these troops generally know their own terrain better than any urban-based national military or foreign team and can thus operate with greater ease. They know the ingress and egress routes, tactical key terrain, best sniper vantage points, and choke points better than any outsider. Third, locals may not even wish for a strong formal federal military presence,<sup>110</sup> and a local police force could be more palatable for these types of populations. Continual and close interactions between police on the outskirts of territories and locally acceptable civilian patrols inside communities were noted as valuable during the counterinsurgencies in Malaya and Vietnam<sup>111</sup> (creating trust and informal intelligence networks). Fourth, civilian forces theoretically have much at stake being defenders of their own land, family, and lives and may therefore have an interest in continuing the defence against an insurrection in the long run. Researchers estimate that insurgencies may take anywhere from eleven to 40 or more years to defeat,<sup>112</sup> so a community-led militia that sustains across generations may be able to continue the fight against an enemy long after foreign forces (ISAF in the case of Afghanistan) have left. And finally, when an insurgency takes advantage of relatively un-policed borders such as across Syria during the 2003-2010 Iraq war, across Cambodia during U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and across Pakistan with Afghanistan during the 2001-2014 war, indigenous anti-insurgent tribal forces that happen to live

near or on national borders, may be able to help staunch an insurrection's cross-border activities.<sup>113</sup>

Although these theories fail to focus on the motivations and goals of grassroots anti-insurgent efforts—a void this study intends to address—they do investigate the advantages of militias to counterinsurgency in general terms. These experts study artificial anti-insurrection civilian movements as an important auxiliary effort to an overall counterinsurgency campaign. Whether investigating the potential benefits of bolstering overall counterinsurgent numbers or intrinsic value of locals fighting on the side of the government, the theories assume a heavy outside military and national government effort—one that can recruit and oversee militias as one of many tactics to undermine insurrection. Another stream of scholarship argues that such heavy approaches may actually harm a counterinsurgency, and therefore enabling indigenous counter-extremists should be more central. The previous theories assumed Western recruited militias were an ancillary strategy. The following make a case for less emphasis on government and foreign intervention with greater focus on empowering or simply allowing locals to fight and stave off insurgency.

### **1.2.3 Leveraging Clans—Policy Implications**

Some historians and counterinsurgency experts recommend policies that place the main emphasis on working with clans and supporting tribalism. Their evidence is based on the history of Afghanistan in which anti-tribal policies generally fail eventually while those that nurture indigenous rural Pashtun societal systems generally succeed. Tribal areas can have a “societal immune rejection response”<sup>114</sup> to outside attempts at undermining the clan system in Pashtun areas.<sup>115</sup> Therefore extending the government into tribal areas—a government that will seem foreign and alien—is unwise. Similarly, even a counterinsurgency that undertakes raids and direct attacks on or near tribal land may cause a negative reaction from rural clans that would otherwise not pose a challenge.<sup>116</sup>

Experts such as Thomas Barfield,<sup>117</sup> Arturo Munoz,<sup>118</sup> and Khan Idris<sup>119</sup> have often described the history of Afghanistan, through its simplest of lenses, as a contest between informal and traditional Pashtun systems such as *arbakai* and outside forces

such as the Taliban.<sup>120</sup> Although scholars disagree on the current competency and efficacy of local mechanisms of rural security and governance, all agree on the existence of such systems.<sup>121</sup> Historians and regional analysts do not speak to the drivers and aims of such *arbakai* in modern times, but such phenomena certainly help to answer the possible “who” of the previous authors who emphasized the importance of local actors doing the bidding of any counterinsurgency campaign.

In rural Afghanistan—comprising over three quarters of the country’s population today<sup>122</sup>—live semiautonomous communities.<sup>123</sup> Historically, successful Kabul regimes have allowed natural societal resiliencies to govern and secure much of rural Afghanistan.<sup>124</sup> With a few exceptions such as the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman’s direct rule from 1880 to 1901,<sup>125</sup> successful governments in Kabul have governed rural Afghanistan (those areas outside of Kabul, Mazar, Kandahar City, Herat, some provincial capitals and key economic municipalities, major roadways, and major border crossings) largely through local indigenous proxy.<sup>126</sup>

Governments have at times formally recognized *arbakai* and elder unions as legitimate institutions and encouraged them to be responsible for security and governance in their own communities in lieu of national security forces’ enduring or permanent presence.<sup>127</sup> In fact, informal militias along with local tribal councils have been able to exert themselves at different times since the sixth century BC Persian Empire when political leaders in Kabul allowed tribes relative sovereignty.<sup>128</sup> Most recently, during the relative stability under the Musahibin dynasty (1929-1978), leaders from Kabul encouraged and supported *jirga*-appointed and locally run *arbakai* to keep security in rural areas.<sup>129</sup> Kabul’s leadership in that time period believed that pushing central government apparatus into rural areas was ineffective and perhaps even counter productive as it may have encouraged distrust or revolt against the national government.<sup>130</sup> The government in Kabul allowed local communities to address their own grievances and needs, delegating local governance matters to rural informal tribal and village leadership.<sup>131</sup> Local communities, in turn, avoided challenging the national government and its authority. The government’s unobtrusive approach created a symbiosis between formal government and local traditional governance based on the self-interest of both sides. Government institutions in Afghanistan’s capital mostly sought to repel hostile neighbouring states, negotiate



terms of international trade, and interject during major civil strife.<sup>132</sup> Kabul's regional representatives focused mostly on taxation of urban areas, military recruitment for national crises, and countering egregious and sustained criminal activity.<sup>133</sup> The approach to governing rural areas can be described as minimalist.

In recent history, the Taliban as well as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (1978-1992) attempted to expand central government rule throughout contemporary Afghanistan and failed eventually.<sup>134</sup> This is not to say that central governance in Afghanistan is impossible. Instead governments and outside force that have leveraged local resiliencies have appeared to fare better in general, or at least survived longer than those that did not. This conclusion points up that minimalist central government and foreign military strategies, that enable and do not attempt to subjugate rural communities, may be optimal with fewest destabilizing effects. This finding also underlines difficulties perceived foreign threats, such as the Taliban, may have in forcing an alien ideology and ruling system on villagers. This stream of historical scholarship supports those theorists that underline the benefits of minimalist strategies in counterinsurgency environments and Afghanistan specifically.

However, some experts disagree with the contemporary efficacy of Pashtun clan and village traditional governance and security mechanisms. David Phillips, Founder and Director of the Tribal Analysis Center and Afghanistan tribalism author and expert for the past forty years, and David Scott Mann, Founder and Director of The Stability Institute, renowned author on Afghanistan, and the creator and first commander of the U.S. Special Forces Village Stability Operations program in Afghanistan argue that many, if not most, rural southern Afghanistan societies are damaged following thirty years of especially destabilizing warfare.<sup>135</sup> These experts, using over a decade of first-hand observations and interviews with Afghans and NATO military and economic development personnel in every province of southern Afghanistan, conclude that inoperative rural governance and weak societal capacity have been why the Taliban have been able to move into areas that previously would have been able to push out any perceived foreign invaders.<sup>136</sup> To Mann and Phillips, natural *arbakai* may not always be a viable civilian counterinsurgency despite pre-Soviet historical evidence.<sup>137</sup>

At the same time, the central Afghan government is also not a viable substitute for broken traditional governance systems—many locals viewing direct control of the central government as impinging on their way of life<sup>138</sup> as well as a lawful constraint on federal involvement in rural areas and constitutional empowerment of tribal systems to run day-to-day affairs.<sup>139</sup> Mann and Phillips thus look to ISAF to help Pashtuns rediscover the often lost traditional ways of security and clan leadership.<sup>140</sup> As chapter two will describe, the Soviet invasion and then civil war indeed damaged the clan systems. However, to what extent tribes were hurt or ruined and to what extent modern clans are able to rebound and relearn traditional systems of rural Pashtun governance is debatable. One certainty, however, is that each village and each tribe differ greatly in its contemporary ability to govern—whether tribal elders returned after the U.S. invasion in 2001 or whether young clansmen took up the helm and recreated the informal societal processes.<sup>141</sup>

Therefore, whether or not Marjah has viable informal governance could inform the tactics ISAF uses in that area, as will be discussed later in this study. Now, this literature review will look to the strategic and operational advantages of empowering tribes, with the assumption that such clan systems actually exist in a given area. Unlike those authors who recommended outside militaries recruiting neighbourhood watch forces in auxiliary roles, the next section will look to leveraging already existing resiliencies as a central effort.

#### **1.2.4 Leveraging Clans—Strategic Implications**

Instead of viewing militias as either destabilizing threats to liberal society or just strategic auxiliary forces, another stream of literature argues for a minimalist outside approach that emphasizes grassroots civilian efforts. Instead of Western recruited artificial militias as a thickening force to increase formal security numbers, some claim that local grassroots movements can and should be the first and primary step to a security campaign. Once village movements are robust and resilient enough, then national forces can stand. In this way, if national and formal security units falter, there will still be some semblance of security at the local level. Local movements become the necessary base and initial effort so that larger and more formalized movements can then form and operate. The will of the people is most important as a

first step in both insurgency and counterinsurgency.<sup>142</sup> When they wrote and sometimes attempted to practice this approach, Mao Zedong and General Vo Nguyen Giap were speaking specifically of revolution.<sup>143</sup> However, the strategy can be applied to any nationalist movement—even a nationalist movement that calls itself a counterinsurgency. Likewise, Colonel T.E. Lawrence and Ian F. W. Becket viewed guerrilla and counter-guerrilla campaigns as hinging on popular sentiment and their will to defeat enemies and earn freedom before and above all outside military or central government efforts.<sup>144</sup>

Also assessing grassroots local movements as important are Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic & International Studies, Andrew Wilder of the U.S. Institute for Peace, and Paul Fishtein of Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Each with experience on issues regarding NATO efforts in Afghanistan over the past decade, they argue that a wiser counterinsurgency strategy involves fewer U.S. forces and greater emphasis on enabling natural resilient systems to deny violent extremist safe haven and mitigate drivers of violent.<sup>145</sup> However, none focus on the nature and motivations of indigenous counterinsurgent efforts. Instead, they simply emphasize the need for the existence of such movements as an offered hypothesis to the strategic idea that foreign counterinsurgent forces should be minimal.<sup>146</sup>

Cordesman argues the very presence and activities of outside armies can prolong contemporary insurgencies while a smaller footprint that leverages local resilient actors may be a more prudent approach to counterinsurgency.<sup>147</sup> Supporting this argument, Wilder and Fishtein maintain that counterinsurgency practitioners may be exacerbating the very thing they are attempting to defeat.<sup>148</sup> They argue that direct stabilization activities in rural Afghanistan can ironically cause instability. The paradox of direct stability operations—an accepted term for NATO counter-Taliban operations in Afghanistan<sup>149</sup>—is that they can have destabilizing side effects when foreign entities are the protagonists.<sup>150</sup>

The very presence of foreign security forces and foreign aid organizations—even those claiming to conduct stabilization activities—can destabilize. ISAF is destabilizing<sup>151</sup> when ISAF units become Taliban targets and civilians are caught in the crossfire—both literally and with regards to allegiances. Likewise, when Taliban

enter an area, they may also spur ISAF and/or ANSF incursion, possibly also causing civilians to be caught in the crossfire. Beyond possible short-term security gains, outside party projects that are associated with stability operations can have destabilizing effects.<sup>152</sup> Even when projects are aimed at attempting to mitigate analysed sources of instability, those projects can add to overall instability and insecurity. For example some experts argue that project funding ends up in the hands of insurgents through illicit taxation, can aggravate perceptions of corruption when money goes through the hands of corrupt leaders, and can exacerbate feelings of disenfranchisement when distribution of stabilization projects is uneven amongst the population.<sup>153</sup> They conclude that even a modest targeted counterterrorism mission can quickly turn into a counterinsurgency when violent extremists can leverage U.S. presence and operations to grow their local recruiting numbers—leaving the U.S. in a mission that barely resembles its initial intent.<sup>154</sup>

Over the past decade a number of authors have also concluded that a low Western military presence in any counterinsurgency mission, beyond that of Afghanistan, is essential so as to avoid generating further recruits.<sup>155</sup> For the past seven years Robert Pape has written articles and two books and conducted seminars throughout the world using a swath of data as evidence that suicide terrorism derives from occupation of land.<sup>156</sup> His conclusion claims that terrorism draws occupation and occupation spurs terrorism. According to Pape, this occupation-terrorism action-reaction is a potentially continuous cycle with effects of insecurity and instability for civilians. Pape's extensive and detailed data culling—taking into account the limits of certain streams of information on some suicide bombings—and use of analysts who are native speakers of the terrorists' homelands uncovers occupation as a driver of violent extremists that then drives government intervention that then drives further violent extremist actions.<sup>157</sup>

Pape's *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* claims to analyse “every” suicide attack from 1980 to 2009 (almost 2,200).<sup>158</sup> To earn a place on his database, the individual had to intend to kill others, and two or more independent sources must have verified the event. Specifically, his findings include that foreign military forces stationed in other countries accounted for 87% of over 1,800 suicide plots since 2004. U.S.-allied Pakistani force occupation of tribal

areas accounts for another 12 per cent. Also, the timing of militaries' deployment accounts for the instigation of each of eight large-scale suicide-bomb campaigns (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, al-Qa`ida internationally, Israel, Lebanon, Chechnya, and Sri Lanka) between 1980 and 2009—96 per cent of the 2,188 cases between those years.<sup>159</sup> Such attackers used the reason of foreign occupation of other lands as the primary reason for their attacks, and militaries in turn used the presence of violent extremists as justification for occupation.<sup>160</sup>

Similar to Pape's research, Rohan Gunaratna describes an action-reaction cycle between terror and wider societal repression. Gunaratna states that incursion into Islamic territories produces extremism and produces a clash where a material military might meets ideological/moral resistance. The author postulates that Usama bin Ladin intended to spur wide suppression to attract those that previously wanted nothing to do with violent extremism.<sup>161</sup> In short, bin Ladin's main goal was to mobilize violent extremists to cause government suppression in order to cause further radical cell recruitment and activity.

Instead of focusing on the nature and drivers of grassroots anti-extremist attempts, these authors argue the downsides of any high-profile military presence that could build and lead anti-insurgent militias. Either as a corollary stream of reasoning<sup>162</sup> or as an offered hypothesis,<sup>163</sup> these experts write generally about the necessity of identifying and leveraging local counterinsurgent civilian efforts without a record of what could drive or how to deal with or analyse such phenomena. However, in the case of rural Pashtun areas of southern Afghanistan, where Marjah lies, historians have emphasized the resilience of *arbakai* specifically. Although these previous authors do not attempt to analyse what local systems may be empowered as an alternative to a large foreign military presence, those that study the history of Afghanistan emphasize rural traditional Pashtun systems—of which Marjah's militia is one.

### **1.2.5 Conclusion**

Debates continue to rage in modern literature on the extent of the importance of localized paramilitary forces in counterinsurgency. Some continue to maintain a

certain number to supplement the central formal military operations, while others argue such militias should be a core and preliminary step. Publications also continue to abound on the various tactical and stabilizing values of civilian locals countering insurgency on a local level. In policy circles, experts even contend whether to deal with tribes and their militias at all—clan-ism being a possible affront to liberalism, stability, government authority.

However, literature as of yet has failed to address naturally born anti-violent extremist movements and their motivations. To date scholarship has failed to analyse whether such self-started movements may or may not benefit a counterinsurgency effort. Neither has research yet wrestled with the characteristics of such grassroots movements; the conditions that may spark these uprisings; how a military may or may not affect anti-insurgent militias; and what frameworks or methodologies may help to identify and leverage movements.

In the past decade reporters and some analysts have been able only to discuss one reportedly naturally born movement against violent extremism in the context of a counterinsurgency environment—the Anbar Awakening in Iraq from 2006 to 2007.<sup>164</sup> Reports suggest this self-propelled semi-autonomous movement may have been a turning point in ridding al-Qa'ida in Iraq from the country for several years.<sup>165</sup> However analyses and an unclassified military report<sup>166</sup> comprising dozens of interviews of Iraqi leaders of the indigenous movement, more questions than answers exist on why such an uprising occurred. Without serious research during the actual throes of the uprising itself,<sup>167</sup> authors are often left to postulate as to the possible triggers, conditions, and characteristics of why these civilians rose up, risked their lives, and killed to defeat—at least temporarily—violent extremists. Elucidating such matters will also add to and advance the debates and studies of counterinsurgency theories and policies. If such a self-driven movement flourishes, then it could add to and advance the notions that government should keep a minimal footprint while supporting rural Pashtun systems of rule. If this indigenous effort fails, the reasons may help to support and add clarification on the ideas that tribalism hurts counterinsurgency campaigns and could weaken governments.

### **1.3 Research Approach and Methodology**

To understand the drivers of an anti-extremist *arbakai*, an area was selected in which a successful movement was already underway. Once selected, the core research involved interviewing the fighters and their leaders. To supplement these interviews, the study draws upon an array of primary sources from testimonies of non-Afghans operating in the area as well as unclassified and declassified reports and analyses of the conditions in the area and activities of the *arbakai*. Such an approach assured a multitude of perspectives and insights to paint a robust picture of the characteristics, motivations, and mindsets of the movement.

#### **1.3.1 The Choice of Marjah as a Case Study**

First, the study needed a selection of an area that met specific criteria. The research focused on one area in Afghanistan where a counter-violent-extremist campaign was already underway because 1) there needed to be a manageable sample for a single researcher, 2) there is currently an active war in which some indigenous groups have the opportunity to assert themselves against violent extremists, and 3) NATO commands could provide ample security for a researcher and potential respondents to conduct a study safely.

When deciding on which community in Afghanistan to focus, the criteria was to research on an area that rose up against violent extremists themselves instead of U.S. regular or Special Force-initiated local defence forces. This study does not research and analyse the militias in which outside military units come into a village to recruit, inspire, train, and fund a paramilitary civilian force. Instead, this research only focuses on a militia that is self-propelled without outside initial assistance, money, management, or coaxing. However, this study's criteria for choice of location would allow for the possibility of limited outside military assistance once the uprising already begins and is already underway. The key factor is only that any possible support comes after an indigenous uprising began naturally because this study focuses on motivations, aspirations, and actions that spring only from grassroots efforts.<sup>168</sup>

The purpose of these criteria is to contribute to literature on counterinsurgency and Afghan rural stability. A body of literature already exists on recruiting local civilians

into foreign-military-led and funded militias as well as the techniques, tactics, and operational considerations of such a strategy.<sup>169</sup> This study intends to add value to a fledgling discipline on self-motivated civilians that rise up to kill and die in the name of eradicating violent extremists. As of yet, this stream of publications comprises mostly anecdotal stories and disparate unclassified reports even though it is likely to be an important phenomenon as Western, African, Southwest Asian, and Southeast Asian governments seek to find ways to undercut violent extremism with a minimum footprint in the decades to come.<sup>170</sup>

After finding an area that meets this criteria, it was necessary to interview and observe *arbakai* fighters as the movement was underway. This study intends to uncover the stories, messages, themes, aspirations, and motivations of the movement while in its throes, not through an historical lens. The study does not rely on historical accounts after the battles against the Taliban in this village because soon NATO will withdraw perhaps not allowing the appropriate security it would take for a researcher to conduct open interviews over an extended time period. Also, after the movement is complete, some fighters may have died or moved away especially if the movement eventually fails to keep the Taliban out.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, unclassified and declassified reports with vital information may be lost or burned as is often the case when multiple military elements rotate in and out of an area.

In 2011, during the planned field research for this study, the village of Marjah was the only setting in Afghanistan that met the criteria. There were no other reported successful or functioning naturally born anti-Taliban uprisings in Afghanistan at that time.<sup>172</sup> Outside of Afghanistan, this student would not have enjoyed the ample security NATO provided to conduct the interviews. While conducting pre-field-study research, local Afghan media and NATO began reporting that a self-initiated civilian militia was helping to effectively eradicate Taliban presence and influence in the village of Marjah. According to separate streams of reports the Marjah *arbakai* were helping to change the village from one of Taliban's headquarters and one of the most dangerous areas in Afghanistan<sup>173</sup> into one of the safer regions of the country.<sup>174</sup>

Although this is a single case study, the intent is to open debate and rigorous analysis of counter-violent-extremist uprisings regionally and worldwide. This study may inform some themes common and some uncommon to similar uprisings around the



world and help academics and policymakers to identify the conditions and characteristics of such grassroots civilian movements.

### **1.3.2 Structure for the Study**

Once Marjah was selected as an acceptable area for a case study, research began on the composition and disposition of the village's *arbakai*. To illuminate the structure and tendencies of *arbakai*, the second chapter will focus on rural resilience in Pashtun lands—*arbakai* being a traditional and informal security apparatus of traditional local governance. This section argues that, at its simplest, one may view rural history of southern Afghanistan as a contest between clans and armies that sometimes attempt to weaken tribalism. The chapter ends with a discussion on whether the most recent three decades of war may or may not have undermined current governance systems to include Marjah's militia.

Then, in chapter three, the study focuses on Marjah, which is unique in Afghanistan as a Western-invented village. The clan system within the village informs the *arbakai* structure. The chapter then moves on to how and why both Taliban and then ISAF made Marjah a main effort—both sides surging into the village. Before delving into the study's body it is vital to provide the greater context and description of outside forces—the environment in which the *arbakai* would operate. The second and third chapter do not attempt to answer why Marjah's *arbakai* combats violent extremists but instead reveals historical precedent and organization of the militia.

After these two chapters on the history of Pashtun lands and then contemporary history of Marjah, this paper offers and tests three hypotheses—one chapter for each—on why the militia rose and fought Taliban. The three hypotheses derived from literature and primary sources on global and regional schisms between Muslim civilians and violent extremists. For this study, the intent was to uncover general themes of opposition to violent extremism that could play out in Marjah and inform the study of this village *arbakai*. This approach allows a theoretic starting point and framework against which to test and compare this particular movement and offers a structural base for the study.

In the absence of an established body of rigorous scholarship on motivations of autonomous indigenous counter-violent-extremism movements,<sup>175</sup> especially in rural Afghanistan,<sup>176</sup> the hypotheses emerged from an exhaustive analysis of literature and reports on opposition directed at regional and worldwide strands of violent extremism. They include criticisms derived from analyses of violent extremists' ideological vulnerabilities, criticisms by recanted violent extremists, limited polling of populations' views, and assumptions that ISAF made in its doctrine. To be potentially applicable to the case study of Marjah, the hypotheses focus only on violent extremism that shares the similar tactics of Taliban in southern Afghanistan<sup>177</sup>—conducting suicide bombings, targeting civilians, forcing locals to adhere to strict laws, and enforcing some type of “true” belief system of mankind.<sup>178</sup>

It should be noted that the drivers for this *arbakai* may very well be complex and comprise nuanced motivations that do not exactly fit the hypotheses. Therefore, the hypotheses act as a starting point—a prelude into an investigation that may be more complex than just substantiating or disproving hypotheses. One only has to look to the literature of why people join violent organizations to see that there may be multifaceted reasons. From different approaches and methodologies on the study of violent extremism and counter-radicalization, psychologist John Horgan,<sup>179</sup> retired CIA operations officer Marc Sageman,<sup>180</sup> senior government intelligence analyst and Islam expert Quintan Wiktorowitz, and field researcher Sarah Ladbury,<sup>181</sup> agree that many paths with multiple motivations lead people to violence. Likewise, it may also be the case that multiple paths and motivations can lead anti-extremist fighters to action. However, to structure this study, the three most prevalent themes in literature act as hypotheses from which conclusions can be drawn that may very well reveal motivations that are more nuanced or perhaps broader than what the initial hypotheses propose.

The first hypothesis, in the fourth chapter, looks to stability as a possible goal of counterinsurgent civilian efforts. This theory considers the direct instability and insecurity violent extremists may bring to a village along with an explanation of ISAF and NATO's assumption that stability is the goal of all entities that are against Taliban. This hypothesis is tested not only in the motivations for the Marjah uprising—as told through interviews—but also in how the *arbakai* address instability

immediately and in the long-term as recorded in multiple foreign reports. Arbakai define stability as security and access to education and struggle towards this end state daily with resolve with data suggesting success in their pursuits.

The second hypothesis considers the schisms of ideology as a possible motivation for revolt against violent extremists. The existential threat to the traditional rural power structures—and as a corollary, the actual materialization of this threat into killing of indigenous leaders and other civilians—comprise one major schism between civilians and violent extremists in Afghanistan, south Asia, and worldwide. The Taliban impose an alien belief system while directly killing off all local leadership and citizens who posed a threat before Marjah's militia rose up. The arbakai's words and actions, via interviews with the fighters and the reports of NATO onlookers, will explain to what degree this hypothesis acted as a potential motivation.

The third hypothesis investigates whether or not the protection of tribalism may have motivated those that rose up against violent insurrection in Marjah. Recent reports and literature underline the incompatibility of clans and violent extremist groups who see tribal systems as potential secular threats to their ideas and ability to rule. Also, military doctrine assumes that rural areas will use the protection of informal rural systems of governance as a rallying cry to rise up against Taliban. The study then tests this hypothesis and uncovers which identities Marjahns drew as motivation to fight.

Following the three chapters on testing hypotheses is an analysis of an underlying motivation that coloured each of the findings of the previous three chapters and also revealed itself uniquely through words and actions of the fighters. This self-determination was not only the common theme of all interviews and arbakai operations but also was the centre of strength for the anti-Taliban uprising. The chapter concludes by looking to how and why local ISAF units nurtured autonomy, strengthening the phenomenon as a motivation, means, and goal.

The conclusion provides a final analysis of the drivers and greater context of the motivations of the movement on which this case study focuses. Then, this concluding

chapter looks to how and why this particular case study is important to future scholarship on similar grassroots movements.

Before any conclusions could be made and after arriving at hypotheses for why a movement may rise to kill violent extremists, it was essential to employ a multi-faceted methodological research approach to analyse the movement. It was necessary to analyse unclassified and declassified government reports, investigate first-hand accounts and observations, and finally to interview Marjah guardians while they were serving out their duties.

### **1.3.3 Unclassified/Declassified Reports on Marjah's Population**

For greater context beyond the core interviews, this study uses unclassified data to attain multiple perspectives on arbakai attitudes, operations, actions, and success. This researcher successfully requested the declassification of documents and assessments for research. It was not enough to only uncover the verbal claims of fighters, so a comprehensive cross-section of primary sources was necessary.

To verify and expand upon information from the interviews, the intent was to collect information from unclassified ISAF atmospherics reports, CIA's Open Source Center media translations and analyses, U.S. Department of Defense's Human Terrain System reporting; unclassified ISAF-directed population surveys, and previously unreleased U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Democracy and Governance Stabilization Unit products such as analyses and data from the "Measuring The Impact Of Stabilization Initiatives" program.

The study never relied solely on "survey data," whether government or private, because many surveys in southern Helmand and Afghanistan writ large may be deeply flawed due to insecurity,<sup>182</sup> lack of oversight, convenience polling only in safe areas, and translation challenges.<sup>183</sup> However, some survey data may be helpful when looking for general trends over years as long as the survey is conducted in the same manner each time.<sup>184</sup> Fortunately and uniquely, for this study's interviews of arbakai, Marjah had ample security and allowed this researcher to oversee translations directly and conduct the queries personally.

### **1.3.4 GIRoA, NATO, and Development Organizations' Perspectives**

To provide yet one more layer of greater context, the study used reports and testimonies on the perspectives of outside actors observing or working with Marjah's arbakai. Not only did this allow yet more perspectives on the motivations of arbakai, but it also allowed an inside understanding to the NATO and GIRoA actions and operations that affected the arbakai. It was not enough to only study the arbakai and local perspectives—as any outside influence or action can affect the movement in Marjah.

This researcher investigated the conditions and actions of the arbakai and outside forces through statements of NATO and Afghan officials in the fields of stability, development, governance, counter-narcotics, intelligence, and security. Some of this information derived from open military commanders' post-deployment lessons-learned academic sessions; unclassified first-hand military debriefings; reports from local Afghan media; unclassified Special Operations Command reports; and declassification of reports, specifically for this study, on intelligence, stability, and security perspectives.

These primary sources allowed this study to put Marjah's arbakai movement in strategic, operational, and tactical perspective with regards to the activities of NATO, development groups, GIRoA, and Afghan security forces. Furthermore, the study can investigate how outside militaries were able to leverage or enable the arbakai and the reasons for such decisions.

### **1.3.5 Strategy for Interviews with Militia**

The core research comprised interviews with over one-quarter of Marjah's arbakai to include its top leaders and deputies during the spring and summer of 2011. As much as possible, the interview strategy applied survey standards such as random samples, careful translation of questions, word appropriate questions for Marjah, and a large sample size. The goal was to collect professed aspirations, identities, goals, fears, motivations, and thoughts on the Taliban as the fighters were serving actively in the militia. Open questioning was therefore paramount to hear fighters' numerous

competing ideas that may include themes and ideas not covered in this literature review or initial research.

The study employed some survey best practices so that interview results would be representative of local perspectives. The interviews targeted adult males, who voluntarily combat violent extremist elements, to find out what motivations initiate and sustain its members and communities. Stratified sampling (breaking up the target group into separate cells such as female fighters and elderly fighters) was unnecessary since village militia members are male and typically between 18-35 years old. The oral survey included 113 militiamen out of a total of 400 civilian fighters, over 25 per cent of the target population—a sufficiently large number to minimize sampling error. To avoid judgment, convenience, or cluster sampling, the interview strategy broke the targeted community into 20 geographic areas and randomly surveyed fighting age males from each area. In conclusion, the study used a large sample size, and each militia member had a reasonably equal opportunity of being selected.

The interviews included the following questions:

- 1) Why do you oppose violent extremism?
- 2) What were the events that led up to your opposition to violent extremism?
- 3) What are the main reasons your tribe/village opposes violent extremism? Why?
- 4) How long are you willing to oppose violent extremism? Why?
- 5) Will your sons oppose violent extremism? Why?
- 6) What is the religion of the Taliban?

It must be noted that after speaking with NATO troops serving in Marjah, shopkeepers, linguists, and Afghan National Security forces, it was learned that the literal translation of “violent extremism” has no meaning to Marjah residents. Those that are any element of the Taliban are dubbed “Taliban.” And the ideology is also known as “Taliban.” So the term “Taliban” replaced “violent extremism” before the interviews to make questions locally appropriate and comprehensible.

The term “war motivation,” “counter-radicalization strategy,” “counter-extremist incentive,” “messaging,” or “strategic story” would unlikely translate well into Pashto to the target community, which comprised almost entirely illiterate residents with no

education. Fighters never attended formal military training or read even the most-well read books on war and insurgency. Colonel TE Lawrence and Sun Tzu are unknown to them. So the interviewer chose to ask them why they did what they did, what they believed, and how they came to join and fight in a militia against the Taliban.

In the first question, the interviews used the word “oppose” so that it would not assume the level of hatred, distrust, or apathy. The strategy was to allow the respondent to speak freely without parameters about his feelings about the Taliban. It was, however, safe to assume that respondents opposed the Taliban since they joined a group that primarily killed Taliban.

While the first question deals with the “why,” the second question attempts to uncover the “how.” The question was designed to find the actual events and practical mechanics behind the motivation. Inspired by John Horgan’s research<sup>185</sup>—looking to events and mechanics to uncover perhaps a more accurate and richer story—the question might have also allowed me to uncover dissonances between the “why” and “how.” However, participants did not seem to care for the difference in the wording between the first and second questions. Instead most of those surveyed used the second question as an opportunity to expand upon or reaffirm the first question despite attempts to re-ask the question or emphasize words in the second question.

The third question was an attempt at forcing the respondent to put personal decisions aside and speak about his interpretation of neighbours, colleagues, friends, leaders, and the entire village’s feelings. The question was inspired by the District Stability Framework’s four-question Tactical Conflict Survey,<sup>186</sup> which twice asks an individual to speak about the village instead of himself. As this paper will discuss later, respondents appeared to be so attached to a communal identity, that the third question ended up acting as a check on the first question and showed consistency with the first two questions.

The fourth question on how long a person believes he will continue his opposition and fighting was an attempt to detect that person’s dedication to the cause. While not all

responses may have been truthful, the answers themselves on “fighting to the death” or “fighting forever” were important to understand the overall attitude of the militia.

The fifth question on the views of their children was yet another attempt to gauge militia members’ projected longevity and intensity of cause. Sons appeared to be so important to these men (many of the men would change their own names to be called the “father” of their first son) that this question attempted to spark serious thought to dedication.

The final question brings up religion so as not to influence answers to the other questions. It was found that if discussion about Islam occurred in introductory conversation—which sometimes lasted over an hour as is custom in Afghanistan and southern Helmand specifically—the respondents’ answers were always spoken in religious language. These first few interviews were not included in the study, because the answers sounded unnecessarily tainted.

Respondents rarely answered questions directly and did not tell linear stories. Sometimes after the last question, perhaps feeling the interview was finishing, they would add in rich stories and analogies pertinent to earlier questions. What was recorded, per participant, was essentially one single nonlinear storyline that did not abide by the structure of the questions. So when analysing the statements, use was made of the entire story. The questions ended up serving at-times as signposts and inspiration for emotional stories, descriptions of events, and streams of consciousness that were master messages for each participant.

### **1.3.6 Interview Limitations**

Before conducting these interviews it was essential to address a number of potential limitations. One potential limitation was the possibility of a weak translator. The linguists were bilingual, but none had been school trained in the extremely difficult art of interpretation and translation.

To mitigate this limitation, I only used the most seasoned and recommended interpreters in southern Helmand according to Marine Corps commanders. Normally,



I would have from four to five linguists from whom to choose on each interview outing—the number of translators with each civil affairs attachment with whom I physically embedded. Fortunately, because of their daily interactions with populations, civil affairs teams were able to employ only the most seasoned and proven interpreters according to the commanders with whom I spoke. Furthermore, I had regimental commander’s personal linguist translate the questions in Pashto and had these translations checked and rechecked with numerous linguists. Before going out, I would also have a linguist interpret something into Pashto for me, and another linguist re-translate the statements into English to me. This is normal practice for testing interpreters’ level of expertise. Interpreters appeared to respect me, because I have been a translator and interpreter (English-Arabic) before. I would speak to each linguist about the intellectual challenges of translation as an extremely demanding discipline—each linguist seemed to respect my grasp of their daily intellectual struggles. Furthermore, I would discuss the nature of my survey so that linguists would understand the importance of each question being asked in the same manner to keep the study consistent.

Another potential constraint is that I look, sound, and dress “American” according to Marjahns. Many locals view Americans as “money trees”—handing out money for projects from million-dollar roads to small business grants to battlefield repayments for property destroyed. Surveys are often seen as Americans asking locals what projects they might need next.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, there was potential for participants to veer the conversation towards their particular needs and wants—seeking out money from me or the commanders with whom I embedded. To diminish this potential distraction, I explained that I was only a researcher and student with no access to funds. The researcher, as explained, had no authority, was not an advisor, and had no money as a student.

Another possible limitation was that participants might think that I might publish research with their identities. To mitigate this potential limitation, I explained that I would not take down their names or locations and would keep their identities hidden. However, not one participant had any problem telling me their identity, home community, position within the community, and clan status. Many wanted pictures with me as well. They would often speak with passion and sometimes yell they felt

so emotional about the subject of the Taliban. Some talked for as long as an hour after only one question divulging personal information against this interview's extremely clear and firm protest. It was this researcher's job to avoid writing down identity information, even when they provided it and insisted it be published. And it was this researcher's duty to keep the interview moving forward after long impassioned speeches. They appeared very proud of fighting the Taliban, and many seemed to even seek fame or recognition for their victories over Taliban cells. Many were also proud of their clan identities. So, again, it was up to this student to look interested out of basic courtesy but not record such information.

Another challenge was instituting random sampling, as I described earlier. First, I assumed that perceptions of participants would vary from one location to another so I conducted interviews in twenty different locations throughout the town proper chosen randomly—not by security constraints or areas of expected willingness to participate. Second, respondents occupied different positions within the militia web from fighter to block elder to militia deputy leaders and leaders. I interviewed the two supreme commanders along with 14 commanders of smaller units. Third, militia members were interviewed throughout the course of the day from dawn to dusk with no preference for time of day or day of the week, to include Friday when some militiamen were working despite being the day of prayer.

Yet one more factor to consider was the total sample size. There are the number of *arbakai* members whom the U.S. Department of Defense pay, the number of members that *arbakai* leaders claim, and the number of *arbakai* that NATO advisors estimate. The estimates of size changed several times per month in the spring and summer of 2011. Such changes in estimates were sometimes due to changes in NATO funding and programming (allowing for over 1,300 militiamen before the interviews began dwindling down to 800 and then 400 later in 2011); occasional accidental or natural deaths, assassinations, injuries, retirements; and migration by some to the formal Afghan government army or police.<sup>188</sup> Additionally, this study focuses on the village proper of Marjah, not those militiamen in the “village” of Sistani; the desert outskirts to the north, south, and east; or the Afghan Local Police in Nad Ali (the formally recognized incorporated district in which the village and unincorporated agricultural district of Marjah reside). The estimated total as the final formal NATO count in

2011, in this study's areas of interest, was 400.<sup>189</sup>

This methodology seeks to fill a clear void in scholarship, which previously has not attempted first-hand to unearth data on why a self-driven movement would rise up against violent extremists. The holistic research methodology that included interviews with Marjah's civilian guardians, data from declassified and previously unclassified unpublished reports, and first hand accounts by outside observers and participants would prove or disprove hypotheses. However, before delving into why Marjah guardians rose against Taliban, it is vital to understand the historical backdrop that materialized into the vehicle by which militiamen gathered and fought.

## **Chapter 2**

### **An Introduction to Southern Rural Afghanistan**

Before testing hypotheses on why Marjah's militia rose up against violent extremists, this chapter will present a brief overview of history of southern Afghanistan through the lens of Pashtun rural governance of which *arbakai* are a traditional security arm. The chapter focuses on Pashtuns because almost all Marjahns and over 95 per cent of Marjah's province Helmand comprise citizens of this ethnicity.<sup>190</sup> The history of rural Pashtuns in the south of the country that became Afghanistan acts as prelude to the structure and oral traditions of the *arbakai* on which this study focuses. This chapter does not attempt to explain why *arbakai* fight Taliban but instead to describe the vehicle by which Marjah's fighters gathered, planned, and rose against violent extremists.

#### **2.1 Pashtun Systems of Governance and Security**

A lens to understand rural Pashtun Afghan history is the fight for survival of local clans against anti-tribal policies and operations of central and outside powers. For centuries empires and armies have prized Afghanistan.<sup>191</sup> The area that today comprises the modern country of Afghanistan was a passageway for the Silk Road connecting China and India to the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. Attempted occupations from Mesopotamian armies to the Soviet rulers have tried to change the power bases, culture, religion, politics, and ethnic landscape of much of Afghanistan. Foreign armies have razed municipalities and sought to upend local power structures and traditions to attempt to directly rule Afghans. Outside nation states and regional intelligence and religious movements have exiled and killed indigenous natural leaders and instituted new laws to attempt to render tribalism and tribal power irrelevant. Warfare and a warrior culture—sometimes descending into internal strife amongst the Pashtuns—became part of the fabric of life as Pashtuns fought and defeated stronger armies. Local governance and security systems—even before Pashtun groups declared war against outsiders—was a perceived threat to any centralized authority that wished to rule the passageways that would help make outside empires stronger economically and militarily whether at the hands of the reportedly Pakistani-backed and influenced Taliban or the Macedonians.<sup>192</sup>

However, there have been interludes to anti-tribal policies from some regimes that elected minimalist policies to allow rural areas to govern and secure themselves most of the time.<sup>193</sup> These non-authoritarian regimes believed that it was financially and militarily advantageous to leave the Pashtun rural south be, allowing Pashtuns to attempt to relearn old governance models. The reasons include that most rural dwellers focus on subsistence farming and do not create wealth to provide significant taxes and goods for a central government. Also, the terrain is simply too difficult to easily manage most of Afghanistan—from swaths of some of the world's hottest deserts to almost impassable rugged mountains, it is logistically difficult and expensive to reach most rural villages even today.<sup>194</sup> Furthermore, these rulers believed that a light central government footprint in the southern Pashtun hinterlands would assuage any potential tendency of the Pashtuns to bare arms against the state.<sup>195</sup> In summary, governing most of Afghanistan directly has been historically unprofitable.<sup>196</sup> Many have tried direct rule—attempting to eradicate or weaken tribal power—and most of these efforts have failed quickly. Those that appeared to succeed to directly rule over tribesmen and village-men and women through sheer force were short-lived.<sup>197</sup>

These unobtrusive powers attempted to focus less of their efforts internally and face outwardly to the world to increase their coffers. They saw the Pashtun tribes as offering little in the way of prize so they looked to negotiate international trade along some main roads and relatively few federally controlled border-crossing points.<sup>198</sup> Occasionally, however, during times of international security threats, these minimalist powers needed to supplement the numbers in their armies from the southern tribes. Additionally, when Pashtun tribal infighting became so intense as to possibly spark nationwide civil strife, the central government would send its troops to quell violence.<sup>199</sup> Except for these times of internal regional strife or external security threats, these minimalist central powers saw no reason, under normal peaceful circumstances, to interfere in areas away from major thoroughways, outside major city marketplaces, and far from the larger irrigation plains.<sup>200</sup> This approach to governing rural areas can be described as minimalist and historically has been successful. Relatively successful governments have recognized and used rural resilient systems to their advantage.

Without centrally controlled sub-road networks, religious centres, and government-run markets, the Pashtuns were left to their devices to band together or fight over resources, honour, and control. These regimes have allowed local communities to address their own grievances and needs, delegating local governance and security matters to rural informal tribal and village leadership. Local communities with these authorities, in turn, avoided challenging the national government or its authority. These governments' unobtrusive approach created a symbiosis between the formal central government and local traditional governance based on the self-interest of both sides.<sup>201</sup>

Thriving during minimalist rule and suffering at the hands of more direct-rule totalitarian-like regimes are *qawm*, of which *arbakai* are a security apparatus of a special elders' meeting known as a *jirga*. *Qawm* are one of the primary identities of Pashtuns, and an identity and institution that suffered onslaughts from outside empires, invading armies, despotic regimes, and warlords. *Qawm* describes either a bloodline or territorially based group. In some areas of Afghanistan, a *qawm* is a clan held together by common ancestors. In other areas, displaced individuals from different bloodline tribes may bind together in a community over shared interests in protecting land and living and farming with stability. One can view southern rural Afghan Pashtun history through the lens of the *qawm*—a community that persisted in name throughout history as nontribal actors strove to kill, subjugate, or otherwise simply ignore *qawm* leadership and governance and security systems.<sup>202</sup>

Historians and outside armies alike have had difficulty finding commonalities between Pashtun *qawm*. Each—such as the *qawm* that comprise Marjah village's community—has unique features. The governing structures, values, and number vary from village to village and from tribal area to tribal area.<sup>203</sup> Oftentimes even each individual *qawm* changes in number, structure, and allegiance depending on outside threats. From the Mongols to the Russians to the Taliban, outsiders have often struggled to learn that no two *qawm* are exactly alike even in their *arbakai*'s martial tactics.<sup>204</sup> The egalitarian nature<sup>205</sup> of *qawm* cause even the internal governance and security systems to be replaced as needed to those who display the most persuasive leadership and seems to address the needs of the people.<sup>206</sup>

The differing and changing nature of qawm, both through their natural internal morphing and due to the possible shock of outside forces over the centuries gives the appearance to some outsiders that Afghanistan even today is a land of hundreds of small nations. Nevertheless some historians and anthropologists have attempted to find common themes across rural Pashtun societies.<sup>207</sup> Western scholars often attempt to summarize a code of the qawm in the majority Pashtun populations in Afghanistan—the ethnicity of most Afghans in the south and east as well as pockets in the north and west. Historians and anthropologists discuss the importance of protecting females, hospitality, revenge,<sup>208</sup> and honour, though such broad generalizations can never apply to every qawm at every point in history as each community contains unique narratives and values.<sup>209</sup>

It must be noted that qawm is certainly not the only Pashtun identity, but it is one that most Pashtuns use for justice, security, governance, and stability. Sociologists, anthropologists, and historians have identified other Pashtun identities from the household or *koronay* to regional tribal confederations. Another example is the *kuli* that describes a small settlement of farmers while an *avra* indicates a formal governmental zone.<sup>210</sup> However, for resolving issues such as warfare amongst cousins and disagreements over inheritance, Pashtuns generally seek their qawm elders for counsel and resolution.<sup>211</sup> Though these qawm systems' strength has likely ebbed and surged throughout history, the idea or the memory of this cohesive identity led to the qawm system that exists in contemporary Marjah.

## **2.2 An Overview of Afghan Pashtun History**

Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Afghan rural societies were victim to numerous organized armies who sought to destroy or simply erase the traditional systems in part or in whole. Approximately 330 BC Alexander III of Macedon invaded and ruled Afghanistan. Then came the Hindu Mauryan Empire, Parthians, Greeks, Persians, and Turks, all of whom saw any semblance of qawm elders and security apparatus as potential threat to a central power<sup>212</sup> no matter who short-lived that power was. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD the Arab Empire brought Islam, which Afghan's rural populations adopted often wedding this new belief system with rural culture changing not only the individual way of life but also the qawm systems wholly as now those with religious

authority and knowledge began to hold sway within communities.<sup>213</sup> To this day pilgrims from around the world visit sites of religious interest making south Afghan territories—previously of little value to traders—an area exposed to goods and ideas from around the world. Clans then met arguably their greatest threat. In 1219, his Mongolian army burned cities to the ground and laid waste to some, but not all, agricultural land—even rural land that was not particularly bountiful and previously just sustained communities—when some Afghan tribes stood up to the Mongol Khans. In 1504, a Ghangis Khan descendent founded the Mogul Empire in Kabul—with little respect, knowledge, or interest in local Pashtun rural governance systems.<sup>214</sup>

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, centralized government collapsed allowing the tribes and villages to rule themselves without outside threat. Rising and falling confederations of qawm defined the times. In moments of confrontation or tribal war, clans would ally themselves with other clans and tribal confederations with other tribal confederations. Fluidity and continuously changing allegiances allowed balances of power and helped ensure that despite disputes, Afghans could call temporary truces to tend to their fields during planting, growing, and harvest seasons. Village and tribal shuras comprised elders to make regular decisions and conduct week-to-week business. Village and tribes called for jirgas, when elders needed to make a non-regular decision such as unified action following a devastating flood. Rural areas stabilized themselves with the one enduring identity: the qawm.<sup>215</sup>

Out of this period of tribal alliances came two strong confederations: the Durrani and the Gilzai. Through his tribal super confederation and other allegiances, Ahmad Shah Durrani founded a nation in 1747 allowing the Gilzai to comprise much of the army of this state—stretching through the area that comprises today’s Pakistan into India and even parts of Iran. The Durrani tribal confederation ruled through the clan systems minimally from Kabul from 1747-1838 during which only close relatives—most of whom lived far from Kabul—were potential political rivals while the rulers allowed rural areas generous autonomy.<sup>216</sup>

This time of relative autonomy for Pashtun qawm soon subsided to a time known by outside actors as “the Great Game.”<sup>217</sup> The British and Russian both prized the



routes through the mountain passes that would allow both trade and land routes for their armies between Europe and East Asia. Ill-prepared to face down tribal *arbakai*, *lashkars*, and other types of *qawm* militias that had just come off several generations of relative peace, 1842 saw Afghan tribal warriors slaughter 16,500 British troops along with approximately 12,000 British allied foreign soldiers and British-hired civilian workers.<sup>218</sup> Tribal warriors and the ability of tribes and rural villages to unite and plan against an empire forced Great Britain to discard ambitions of direct control and seek out strategies of influence.<sup>219</sup> Perhaps perplexing to some outsiders, such tribal rebellion began and continued independent of confederation rulers in Kabul; the tribes stood up against outsiders without an explicit goal to rule the entire country, as if their own autonomy was the goal of rural dwellers.<sup>220</sup> The British learned that any outside army and any attempted occupation would likely unite the tribes again—an enemy that would demand the British shore up more guns, ammunition, soldiers, money, and willpower than they could stomach. British soldiers and politicians accepted the power of tribal and village internal resilient systems and elected to avoid any strategy or tactic that would attempt to compromise the tribal organizations and networks in place.<sup>221</sup>

Learning from their initial campaign, British elected that future engagement in and near Afghanistan would have to involve non-martial influence and even perhaps manipulation to either weaken or change the characteristics of rural villages and clans to meet British goals of controlling access between the Middle East and East Asia.<sup>222</sup> During this time, the British were able, for over four decades, to assuage, through constant gardening of negotiating and undermining *qawm* goals of national autonomy, *qawm* elders. However, even this approach offended Pashtun rural societies because often the British would attempt to pay off certain elders that undermined the egalitarian nature of these clans where leaders were only “first among equals” and held no formal hereditary status.<sup>223</sup>

In 1879, the British overthrew the serving Kabul regime following the Afghan leader’s actions to formalize a relationship with Russia. To replace that government, the British set up a Kabul government both friendly to British interests and uninterested in a Russian alliance.<sup>224</sup> In 1880, Abdur Rahman, known as the “Iron Amir,” suddenly pushed Kabul’s central authority on all of Afghanistan and killed or

displaced all tribal revolts to include those that came from his own relatives effectively until there appeared no immediate Afghan challenge to his rule.<sup>225</sup>

Eventually rural tribes rose up against successfully against central power and foreign influence earning independence in 1921 at the conclusion of the Third Anglo-Afghan war.<sup>226</sup> However, the “Iron Amir’s” grandson King Amanullah was in power then and attempted Afghan nationalization and direct governance over rural lands. His regime saw clan and village governance and security systems as an enemy to the complete monopolization of violence within the modern borders of Afghanistan.<sup>227</sup>

Then, in 1929, a new government stepped in to oversee yet one more modern period of relative qawm autonomy.<sup>228</sup> This Musahibin dynasty looked to history to govern rural lands effectively. Leaders from Kabul encouraged and supported qawm systems and allowed jirga-appointed locally run arbakai to keep security when necessary.<sup>229</sup> The government succeeded and lasted in large-part because it respected the autonomy and identity of the rural qawm. Despite a leadership assassination and an internal coup, the dynasty oversaw an era of relative stability—in large part due to a mutual respect between a minimalist central government and traditional rural resilience.<sup>230</sup>

### **2.3 Thirty-Years War**

Following the period of the Musahibin dynasty was a period that some experts have dubbed the “Thirty Years War” in which rural community governance faced periods of attempted obliteration, subjugation, and disregard.<sup>231</sup> In this period, the Soviets, followed by warlords, and then Taliban expended tens of thousands of lives in attempts to grow central regimes that sought to cut through tribal and village elders to connect each rural Pashtun to ruling power in Kabul, far from the deserts of southern Afghanistan. Military and militant forces killed tribal leaders, relocated civilians, and instilled laws to disable rural communities’ natural governance. With elders killed, tens of thousands civilians relocated or fleeing, and outside laws that applied even to the most remote Pashtun lands, the qawm identity was under crisis. Disorder was so much as to lead some of today’s most widely read analysts to conclude that many qawm may be broken beyond repair unless outside forces help to rebuild societal capacity amongst clans.<sup>232</sup>

A 1978 coup eventually led Hufizullah Amin to take over as head of state—a person friendly to Moscow. Amin’s socialist and anti-clan political strategies met with tribal insurrection in 1979 leading to the Soviet army’s invasion and occupation of the country.<sup>233</sup> To ensure control, Moscow stood up a proxy regime in Kabul to create a version of communism that would authoritatively rule over each Afghan without any use or reverence for qawm leaders, laws, or *arbakai*. For example, Soviet army units targeted wealthy landowners—traditionally comprising some of the rural Afghan super-elite that played a role in some qawm systems. Most elites immediately fled to Pakistan or even further.<sup>234</sup> Soviet troops then attempted a socialist-style land distribution scheme in an attempt to remove *maliks* and *khans* (tribal or village leaders) from power.<sup>235</sup> By 1985, some scholars estimated that about half of rural Afghan citizens were displaced from their original villages. In reaction to attempted disruption of natural rural identities and systems, new jihad warriors—at whatever age—quickly ascended to governance roles in many villages.<sup>236</sup>

Soon “jihad” rang its bell to the corners of the world bringing in U.S. money to bog down the Soviets and inviting volunteer fighters throughout the world to join the cause of ridding outsiders of this Muslim country.<sup>237</sup> Afghan and foreign mujahidin fought, what was in their eyes, a godless and dictatorial non-Muslim power. Qawm after qawm rose up and joined the movement mirroring the Soviets in a counterinsurgency that faced unique tactics of each different tribe and village.<sup>238</sup>

During this time of traditional Pashtun rural governance disruption, young jihad warriors—who would unlikely have ascended to clan leadership under traditional peace-time qawm—claimed leadership for themselves.<sup>239</sup> Some such Afghan warriors created untraditional trans-qawm militias that later continued to challenge rural systems of governance and security. As the new breed of young tactically tested warriors sometimes disrupted rural governance, Mullahs rose in significance in some areas further upending traditional more secular tribal structures. Providing religious legitimacy to the anti-Soviet jihad, Afghan villagers respected new classes of religious leaders because these Mullahs claimed to know more about the Quran and Hadith than most illiterate Afghans.<sup>240</sup> Mullahs’ increased influence in some qawms altered governance processes to some degree. In summary, disruptions to traditional

peacetime qawm derived externally from the central governments and Soviet army and internally from young fighter-commanders and religious leaders.

By 1980, the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China were providing arms to the mujahidin.<sup>241</sup> Half a decade later, mujahidin leaders met in Pakistan to create an alliance against Soviets, and the United States eventually provided Afghan fighters with stinger missiles to down Russian aircraft in 1986.<sup>242</sup> By 1989 Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan leaving a Russian-friendly leader in place. Even after the Soviets withdrew in 1989, however, the socialist government continued their anti-tribal policies for three more years until it fell in 1992.<sup>243</sup>

Afghan militias began to turn on one another once the Russian backed Kabul regime fell and started to exploit populations. In 1994, many citizens in southern areas welcomed the Taliban as a possible solution to the chaos and warlord-ism since the Soviets had left. The Taliban were able to gain support early on because the vastly illiterate Pashtuns saw them as fellow Pashtun holy men from southern Kandahar province promising an end to corruption and a new age of justice, safe roads for commerce, general security, and stability.<sup>244</sup> But support soured as the Taliban began to encroach on Pashtun traditional way of life. For example, the Taliban outlawed secular education, film, women's education, television, music, kite flying, and popular sports such as dog fighting—imposing their laws with amputations and executions sometimes. The Taliban forced locals to attend prayer and provided no economic or development programs.<sup>245</sup> Other governments accused the Taliban of conducting human rights violations to include the razing of Bamiyan province's giant statue Buddas at the dawn of the following century. The Taliban ideology—in theory and in practice—did not allow for the secular qawm governance systems and envisioned replacing secular rural justice with only Taliban's form of religious law.<sup>246</sup>

Once the Pakistani government and intelligence service began financing them, Taliban were able to defeat rival militias. Amidst mass killings and humanitarian crimes on numerous sides, the Taliban captured the western Herat province in 1995.<sup>247</sup> By 1996, Taliban controlled Kabul and appointed Kandahar resident and self-claimed religious scholar Mullah Omar as leader.<sup>248</sup> By 1998, Taliban effectively controlled 90 per cent of the country and continued to attempt to suppress tribal and

village leadership and customs. Two days before the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., the Taliban assassinated the leader of the Northern Alliance—the most robust anti-Taliban holdout.<sup>249</sup> In the eye of Mullah Omar, there was only room for Taliban's strict interpretation of religious law and no room for tribalism, the Pashtun way of life, or any internal opponents.

U.S. counterterrorism intelligence services increased their focus on Afghanistan in 1996 when Mullah Omar elected to provide Usama bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida leadership sanctuary when Sudan expelled the international terrorist group. Following al-Qa'ida's bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the U.S. President ordered missiles to target possible al-Qa'ida bases in Afghanistan. Then following the 9/11 attacks, the United States began its war against the Taliban who United States government thought were culpable for sheltering al-Qa'ida.<sup>250</sup> Following bombing raids in October 2001, U.S. Special Forces helped the Northern Alliance remove the Taliban from power before conventional U.S. units secured Kabul. Taliban leaders fled to Pashtun areas of Pakistan to include Mullah Omar, who some believe could possibly reside in Quetta over what some scholars and reporters believe is a Quetta Shura—one of the Taliban's governing bodies in exile.<sup>251</sup>

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Although analysts disagree over the efficacy of contemporary rural Pashtun resilience, given the past 30 years of warfare, one could surmise that clans had faced even greater opposition throughout history and were able eventually to reassemble.<sup>252</sup> Thus, it may still be possible that those in Marjah, specifically, may still rely on qawm given its propensity to serve as an identity even after anti-tribal policies of leaders like Ghangis Khan and the "Iron Amir."<sup>253</sup> However, even if qawm systems exist in Marjah, the village's unique inception—an invented village by the United States during the Cold War—complicate how and why the militia rose up.

While this chapter looked to qawm and its *arbakai*—and opposition to these entities—as a consistent theme in a history of foreign intervention, with some decades of reprieve for rural Pashtun traditional systems, the next will look to the unique case of Marjah. While the artificial creation of the town theoretically had the propensity to

undermine or distort traditional qawm systems, the geography actually served to support or even amplify the informal mechanisms of security and governance.

### Chapter 3

#### An Introduction to Marjah

Through a historical lens, this chapter describes Marjah as a Western creation that inadvertently supported the potential for geographically distinct qawm. While the last chapter looked to the qawm in history throughout southern Afghanistan, this section looks to the unique features of governance in this one village. As with the last chapter, this one does not attempt to uncover why arbakai fight and die in the name of defeating local Taliban cells but instead depicts traditional security mechanisms in Marjah that allowed the movement to flourish. This chapter helps to illuminate the “how” and not the “why” of this single case study.

The village of Marjah rests in an unincorporated agricultural district by the same name within the Afghan government and internationally recognized Nad Ali District of Helmand Province in the southwest rural Pashtun desert of Afghanistan (figures 1-4).<sup>254</sup> Along with neighbouring Kandahar province, Helmand was the location of ISAF’s main effort from 2009-2013, while ISAF and international civilian agencies considered the fierce fighting in Afghanistan’s eastern provinces as secondary shaping operations.<sup>255</sup> In 2010, the Marjah village became the centrepiece of ISAF’s surge, as the study will explain in forthcoming chapters. ISAF prized this area because it was one Taliban stronghold, while the Taliban valued this area for its poppy fields and ability to tax millions of dollars of international aid and security contracts helping to fund its elements in throughout the south.<sup>256</sup>

Figure 1: Marjah is in the Helmand river valley in southwest Afghanistan.<sup>257</sup>



Figure 2: Marjah is a village of an unincorporated agricultural district within Helmand province.<sup>258</sup>

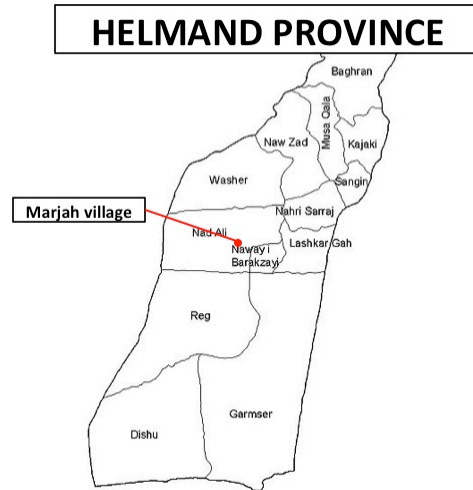
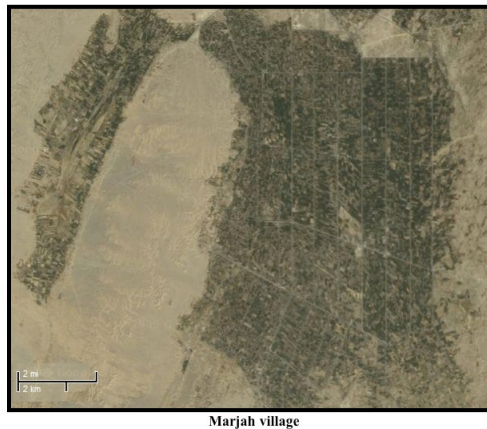


Figure 3: Marjahns are able to farm due to secondary canals from the Helmand river.<sup>259</sup>





Figure 4: Marjah comprises blocks from these crisscrossing secondary canals.<sup>260</sup>



The village Marjah holds some traits similar to other settlements near the Helmand River. These other agricultural communities likely grew naturally and served to inspire further settlers and settlements eventually leading to a series of villages along the Helmand River, which is Afghanistan's longest river providing around 40 per cent of Afghanistan's water.<sup>261</sup> These settlements have endured through present day and help to define the Pashtun lifestyle—subsistence farming. The area that is today the village of Marjah was just outside this system of agricultural communities—too far away from the river to naturally draw water for arable land until a twentieth century scheme to build canals out to Marjah.<sup>262</sup>

Locals have nicknamed Marjah “the jungle” of the Helmand River Valley because its population density is the highest in Helmand with the exception only of the provincial capital.<sup>263</sup> The town holds roughly 75,000 people within 56 square kilometres.<sup>264</sup> The one-storied buildings help ensure an even distribution of about 375 souls per village block with each block taking about approximately four square kilometres.<sup>265</sup> The town centre's population density is the highest in southern Helmand province with the exception only of the provincial capital.<sup>266</sup> Some analysts attribute Marjah's high population density to a swift word-of-mouth information flow and exchange of goods faster than the surrounding areas to include sparsely populated deserts to the north, east, and west. The few people that live in these deserts mostly moved there from elsewhere in Afghanistan to grow poppies in the 1990s. To the south lie smaller villages straddling the Helmand River.<sup>267</sup>

“The jungle” holds a second local nickname, “the oasis,” because in the 1950s and 1960s, the Afghan government along with foreign agencies and companies created this village out of crisscrossing secondary canals with the unfulfilled goal for nomads to settle down into agricultural life.<sup>268</sup> Unfortunately the government failed to conduct soil samples, so the canals offered just barely arable land. The end state was a far cry from the breadbasket this town was supposed to be but nonetheless an improvement from the surrounding more barren desert, more arable than many of the naturally born villages that straddled Afghanistan’s longest river producing around forty per cent of Afghanistan’s water.<sup>269</sup> These secondary canals left perfect blocks, each creating clearly marked neighbourhoods and each with its own qawm and qawm elder.<sup>270</sup>

Subsistence farming is today the way of life as it has been for other naturally born villages around the Helmand river since around 7,000 BC.<sup>271</sup> As it has been for nearby villages, conditions in Marjah are harsh and spartan. The heat index, which includes humidity, kisses 60 degrees Celsius on a typical noon in early August and can touch freezing temperatures in the winter evenings. If it were not for some modern farming equipment, mobile phones, motorcycles, AK-47s, derelict NATO generators, and the occasional sports energy drink and pick-up truck, not too much separates the amenities of this village to other villages near the Helmand river millennia ago.<sup>272</sup> Some analysts and experts have described this area’s environment as “biblical” referring to the overall similarities today to those of a couple thousand years ago.<sup>273</sup> These are the conditions in which farmers-turned-warriors serve in Marjah’s arbakai.

### **3.1 Marjah’s Informal Governance Systems**

The arbakai units serve individual qawm in Marjah. Each block has a qawm with an elder and a governance, justice, and security system like any other qawm in rural Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. Marjahns identify the location of their qawm by giving the original U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) English name of the block. Each row of blocks has a number from north to south, and each column of blocks has a letter from west to east. For example, the block “6F” refers to an exactly defined block in the middle of the village.<sup>274</sup> Some Marjahns give their block an

additional name by a block's unique physical feature such as an especially large well. However, when a Marjahn proudly states from which block he comes, he is not just providing a location but describing his distinct qawm identity as if the qawm were a sub-village with its own governance.<sup>275</sup>

It is this identity—the qawm with distinct geographic boundaries—that appeared the strongest identity of those in town. Block elders held the most power and responsibility.<sup>276</sup> Likewise, neighbourhood elders became arbakai sub-commanders unless the block elder felt too old or infirmed for this duty and subsequently appointed someone else from the same block, and a sub-unit of the arbakai comprised representatives from a single block. Furthermore, guardians foremost were expected to patrol and protect their home neighbourhood. Blocks defined the composition of the arbakai and the identity of any citizen. People served, fought, and died for their block independent of ethnic tribe.<sup>277</sup>

The block system was an invention in the desert that defined the communities of the very first settlers, creating a historical precedent and giving birth to the sub-village structure that prevails today—a structure that materialized the historical precedent of qawm. Marjah was one product of the Helmand River Valley Project, which started as the “largest and most ambitious project ever undertaken in the history of modern Afghanistan”<sup>278</sup> but ended as arguably the “largest economic failure toward the development of the country.”<sup>279</sup> The international community poured hundreds of millions of dollars into southern Helmand to make Marjah a centerpiece of the breadbasket of the nation with factories and Western stylized education centres. What came out the other end was a swath of desert turned into subsistence farms. It was supposed to be “the beginning of a new civilization—a new way of life abounding in the riches of worthy endeavor” and turned out to be areas of “reasonably productive farms.”<sup>280</sup> Any judgment of failure, however, refers to the project's original intent. Where there once was barren desert, now there is a town. There was nothing, and now there is something.

The seed of the idea that would eventually lead to Marjah's primary block-qawm identity began over a century ago. In 1910 Afghans and foreign governments and companies began attempting to construct irrigation canals to better take advantage of

the Helmand River. The first wave of canal builders comprised the Afghans themselves, and then German and Japanese technical assistance arrived in the 1930s. The Japanese helped to dig canals up until 1941. The Afghans continued 1941-1946.<sup>281</sup>

During World War II, Afghan King Mohammed Zahir Shah increased his personal coffers by selling food to British forces in Burma. With this money, he eventually hired the American firm that built the Hoover Dam in the United States. This U.S. company Morrison Knudsen agreed despite that the Afghan government refused to conduct the normally requisite drainage and soil assessments. Despite \$63 million U.S. dollars (equivalent to around \$600 million U.S. dollars today) going to the projects, the venture was unfinished by 1949 when the Afghan King's money was running dry. The soil in areas like Marjah was shallow and mostly impermissible for drainage—the U.S.-schooled Afghan college graduates who the King sent to help the projects failed to dig proper drainage ditches or implement development best practices.<sup>282</sup>

The U.S. government then swooped in with hundreds of millions of dollars until the 1960s to prevent the Soviets from picking up the bill and to prevent Russian incursion into Afghanistan. Initially the American government project intended to continue the efforts to make Marjah and surrounding towns the breadbasket of the nation with factories, co-ed schools, modern hospitals, electricity, roads, modern markets, and community centres.<sup>283</sup> The U.S. Export-Import Bank followed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and then followed up by the U.S. Agency for International Development took over the Helmand River Valley Project. The U.S. projects produced a secondary canal system that became the town of Marjah. The projects brought water through wide canals 30 kilometres from the Helmand valley river to Marjah. Once water reaches Marjah, a grid of crisscrossing secondary canals subdivides Marjah into blocks with clear geographic barriers previously described.<sup>284</sup>

This relatively fertile land was originally intended for desert nomads to settle. However, wealthy Helmandis swooped in and claimed land.<sup>285</sup> The landowners were typically regional powerbrokers who brought their closest kin and associates from any tribe into a block. What ensued was a randomly splotched patch quilt of overlapping

bloodline tribes. The largest village directly east, Nawa-e-Barakzai, has only three tribes, while ten main tribes of Marjah do not even begin to define its heterogeneity: Noorzai, Alikozai, Daftani, Wardak, Barakzai, Ishakzai, Alizai, Achakzai, Populzai, and Wardak.<sup>286</sup> Block boundaries slice through and around ethnic tribal barriers—sometimes a block comprises numerous bloodline tribes, and sometime numerous blocks contain a single hereditary clan. Bloodline tribal affiliation took a backseat to the territorial qawm within the block system.

The primary political identity of those in Marjah is the qawm—each taking up the space of a single block.<sup>287</sup> Each block has an elder to whom residents of the block go to resolve disputes, approve decisions, and seek advice.<sup>288</sup> Ask a local where he is from, and he will give you his block location before his bloodline tribal affiliation. Ask a local who his community leader is, and he will give you the name of the block elder. And thus, each block has become its own mini-village.<sup>289</sup>

These physically defined qawm were the mechanism by which Marjah's arbakai rose against Taliban invaders. The system allowed the village—block-by-block<sup>290</sup>—to quickly unite against violent extremist cells and further allowed Marjah to operate with a unity of action. Furthermore, the balance of power amongst the geographic qawm may have ensured longevity against violent extremist threats as overall village structure helped to prevent the possibility of one block taking over the others.<sup>291</sup> In other words the geography of the town helped to avoid internal civil war and strife—the arbakai were able to continuously focus on their perceived outside enemy and avoid descending into chaotic infighting.

The waterways that defined the boundaries of these qawm were a prize for both Taliban and drug lords because they offered ample conditions for poppies—one way by which violent extremists and criminal elements could raise money to fund insurgent activities and create profit. The following sections will investigate how the relative richness of Marjah's soil turned the village into a target of those seeking cash and made block governance systems victim to exploitative and totalitarian alien actors.

### 3.2 The Taliban's Return to Helmand

Just a few months following the 2001 U.S. incursion, the Taliban slowly returned to Afghanistan or came out of hiding to take over villages, districts, and swaths of terrain<sup>292</sup>—retreating, returning, or moving elsewhere depending on NATO and Afghan security operations and presence.<sup>293</sup> Among the many locations Taliban found refuge, Helmand was a particularly tempting prize with its moneymaking poppy fields, socially conservative Pashtuns, and illiterate and vulnerable populations. Many factors may have encouraged Helmandis to allow Taliban's return in some areas to include anger from certain tribes' exclusion of the post-9/11 Afghan political landscape, hatred of Western presence, Taliban offering protection from exploitative militia leaders, and sometimes direct brutal repression.<sup>294</sup>

Regarding Taliban offering protection from non-insurgent drug lords to gain access to land, it is important to highlight the modern history of poppy-seeking militias. Hailing from Helmand's northern district of Musa Qala,<sup>295</sup> the Akhundzadas had fought against the Russians and Hizb-i-Islami militia in the 1980s to maneuver to a position of power over other tribes and the poppy trade in Helmand.<sup>296</sup> Previously a regular crop just in northern Helmand, this family's militia had forced southern farmers, reportedly brutally, to grow and harvest the crop.<sup>297</sup> Akhundzada mercenaries apparently threatened, tortured, and executed farmers who opposed their opium and heroin trade.<sup>298</sup> Their militia elected not to use traditional rural tribal systems in the southern parts of the province but instead operated dictatorially directly with farmers.<sup>299</sup> It should be noted that some researchers have uncovered some evidence that the Akhundzadas employed mutually beneficial arrangements and patronage with some tribal elders on some occasions.<sup>300</sup>

The cartel continued to victimize Helmand farmers to include those in Marjah until the Taliban asked Akhundzadas to surrender or join following the Soviet exit. The Akhundzada leader chose, instead, to flee to Quetta until 2001.<sup>301</sup> In Quetta, the original strongman's nephew Sher Mohammad Akhundzada became close to future President Karzai and Karzai's tribe.<sup>302</sup> They became so close, that once Karzai ascended to interim Afghan President, Sher Mohammad immediately became Helmand's governor in 2001 to resurrect his family's former drug enterprise.<sup>303</sup> Sher

Mohammad swiftly appointed Abdul Rahman Jan as Chief of Police and Dad Mohammad Khan as provincial Director of the Afghan National Directorate of Security.<sup>304</sup> Each with personal informal mercenary units, they effectively killed and tortured their way with impunity to become the ring leaders of the post-9/11 Helmandi drug trade.<sup>305</sup> The militias colluded and clashed at times and attempted to hoodwink ISAF into supporting each's particular efforts.<sup>306</sup> Their ferocity and greed were enough to turn Helmand into the world's top source of opium.<sup>307</sup> Their unrivalled brutal influence and anti-Taliban credentials eventually even made them the "go-to" powerbrokers with whom the few U.S. Special Operators in Helmand in 2002 and 2003 communicated.<sup>308</sup>

Locals hated these three warlords with enough vitriol that some accepted the Taliban back into their villages even with the recent memory of Taliban's harsh enforcement of non-Pashtun law.<sup>309</sup> The Taliban promised Helmandis to protect lives, property, and stability. Specifically, the Taliban employed a narrative that they returned to protect populations from the abuses of the drug lords. The Taliban after 9/11 employed this stream of messaging widely and tended to tread softly feigning respect for qawm law and way of life<sup>310</sup>—likely in an attempt to gain renewed popular acceptance in some areas.

The Taliban also sided with clans in northern Helmand that felt politically disenfranchised—allowing the Taliban safe haven from where they could attack Marjah and then retreat when necessary. The three Helmandi warlords, like Karzai, belonged to the Durrani Pashtun Zirk tribal confederation, which considered the northern Ishakzai tribal groups as undesirable thievish sub-citizens. Given the open prejudice, the Ishakzai believed that they would not be able to share power in the province or have fair representation in the national legislature. Such resentment laid an easy path for the Taliban to partner and take sides against the warlords. Some foreign observers even speculated that some anti-government attacks in northern Helmand could have been the Ishakzai trying to avenge persecution and gain more influence through violence—this tribe feeling they had few legitimate and peaceful political outlets in northern Helmand.<sup>311</sup>

Assessing that the three warlords were forces of instability focused on terrorizing residents, the British command in Helmand in 2005 insisted that Karzai fire them.<sup>312</sup> Karzai relented and appointed Sher Mohammad to the Senate in Kabul city—his two collaborators lost their positions eventually. However, Karzai replaced the governor with Sher Mohammad’s nephew, and Sher Mohammad instructed his now jobless mercenaries to swiftly join the Taliban in an effort to strike a deal with the Taliban and share at least some of the drug money.<sup>313</sup> With new fighters, the Taliban eventually took complete control over the drug trade in Helmand and Marjah in particular.

### **3.3 Taliban Mass in Marjah**

In 2007 Sher Muhammad ally Abdul Rahman Jan—former provincial chief of police—owned roughly 6,000 acres of mostly government share-cropper-run land in and around Marjah for poppy cultivation.<sup>314</sup> To enable their drug business, he bought off 30 police for protection, maintained a 300-strong on-call quick-reaction-force, and still had heavy influence over the local police writ large. He held sway with the provincial government and essentially controlled the drug trade throughout Marjah district. They were also paying off Taliban to include a one million dollar “grant” for a Taliban field hospital in Helmand.<sup>315</sup>

These poppy fields met the three criteria for eradication in 2007-2008 for Afghanistan counter-narcotics efforts. The unique criteria for that time in Helmand was that land needed to be government-owned, controlled directly or indirectly by government officials, and have connections to the Taliban or at least have residents that directly support insurgents. ISAF orchestrated a major poppy eradication operation on this land in the late winter of 2008—when the poppies were high enough to cut down but before harvest could yield opium. ISAF ordained one Tajik kandak (equivalent to a western army battalion with approximately 800 troops) “national narcotics officers” under the command of Muhammad Dawood Dawood, a former Northern Alliance regimental commander from the northern Takhar province that saw drug smuggling and exporting in the 1990s. For technical expertise and to help mitigate temptations for bribes, 35 DynCorps International contractors advised and mentored the kandak



and operation. Due to lack of resources and manpower and a wish to avoid local anger towards Western troops, NATO chose not to be directly involved.<sup>316</sup>

The first night of the operation, when this DynCorps and Tajik force rested in a dry river bed, they received over 12,000 incoming rounds followed by continuous small arms attacks and IED detonations the following day. With such opposition, the force hastened to eradicate as much poppy as possible in less than a month before evacuating with the help of British troops—a necessity given the security situation despite NATO’s original intent not to be directly involved.<sup>317</sup>

Following the narcotics force’s exit, Abdul Rahman Jan felt the need to shore up further defense against any future attempts to undermine his drug trade. So he sided even more closely with the Taliban—allowing them free reign in Marjah itself—a further consolidation of power between Sher Muhammad’s network and the Taliban.<sup>318</sup> The 2008 poppy eradication project helped to turn the town into a Taliban stronghold if it had not been already.<sup>319</sup> Marines reported approximately 1,000 Taliban in Marjah proper by December 2009.<sup>320</sup> Locals reportedly despised not only Taliban-cohort Abdul Rahman Jan and his “thuggish”<sup>321</sup> followers, but they also despised the Taliban itself.<sup>322</sup>

With far more and more dedicated fighters, the Taliban eventually rescinded their partnership with Abdul Rahman and took control from him to turn the village of Marjah into their southern Afghanistan headquarters. The 2008 poppy eradication project sparked a chain of events that turn Marjah, which had already endured some Taliban brutality, into arguably the strongest Taliban stronghold in Afghanistan.<sup>323</sup> While in town, the Taliban subjugated the populace through intimidation and execution. The media and ISAF position appeared to be that up until January 2010, Marjah was a military, political, ideological, and economic hub for violent extremist Taliban.<sup>324</sup>

### **3.4 U.S. Troops Surge on Marjah**

After the United States’ initial 2001 incursion into Afghanistan to militarily defeat the Taliban, the United States and its allies began a trajectory towards a large presence in

rural areas and municipalities alike. By 2004, NATO had approximately 20,000 uniformed troops, most with the mission to protect Kabul. In Helmand and Marjah specifically, only some U.S. Special Forces and a Provincial Reconstruction Team headquartered in Helmand's capital were present.<sup>325</sup> ISAF activities increased a bit when British Soldiers and Royal Marines focused on attempting to secure a "Development Zone" around the provincial capital and select locations in northern Helmand with a view to an "ink blot" strategy hoping that Helmandis would hear about this supposed safe zone to impel those outside the secure area to want to get rid of Taliban and accept international security and aid.<sup>326</sup> Simultaneously some British military teams fought battles against the Taliban in the deserts south of Marjah.<sup>327</sup>

The seeds of surge began when NATO took over command from the United States in 2006. An additional 17,000 U.S. Marines, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines and comparatively smaller increase from other NATO country troops arrived to Afghanistan in 2008. However, the U.S. military command felt this was not enough and surged another 30,000. By 2009, the United States alone had over 100,000 troops in Afghanistan—a comparable number to Soviet Union's footprint in the 1980s.<sup>328</sup> The goal of U.S. military commanders and policymakers, in part on the recommendation of DC's think tanks and most seemingly reputable counterinsurgency theorists, was a presence robust enough to protect Afghan population centres while building and training the Afghan army and police to be self-sufficient.<sup>329</sup>

This thick U.S. military and civilian agency presence considered its main effort, aside from its training missions, to clear the Taliban from Helmand and Kandahar. Quickly, however, the ISAF commander chose to focus on Helmand alone instead of heavy Taliban presence in Kandahar and fierce battles in eastern Afghanistan, which was considered a lower-priority shaping mission. The preponderance of surge forces went to Helmand. Eventually, in 2010, Helmand received 30 per cent of surge forces translating into about 20,000 U.S. Marines and 10,000 U.K. troops along with civilian agency workers in development and diplomacy fields.<sup>330</sup>

Within Helmand, Marjah would quickly become the primary focus—the commander of ISAF believing that the United States needed to show Afghans, Americans, and the

world that the surge was a success by first liberating the village of Marjah from Taliban.<sup>331</sup> The Marjah operation would spearhead the surge and begin the defeat of Taliban in southern Afghanistan.<sup>332</sup> The ISAF commander wanted the operation in Marjah to be a signal turning point for the surge and inspire “momentum” to roll back Taliban presence and influence.<sup>333</sup>

After the first 100 days of Operation Moshtarak, small Taliban cells still operated in and around Marjah at night with relative freedom of movement—continuing its fear and intimidation campaign to attempt to ensure the qawm leaders would not re-establish control. During the day, the district governor was clandestinely gathering his first staff members, and a few market stores were open.<sup>334</sup> Nevertheless the Taliban operated enough at night to intimidate locals to the point that only 350 students were going to school on a regular basis with a total of eight teachers in the town—despite high demand of the locals for primary education—whether conducted under trees, in residents’ basements, or at schools.<sup>335</sup>

Following the initial clearing operations of Moshtarak, U.S. Marines brought in basic humanitarian aid to tend especially to injured civilians, and in fall 2010 the local units shifted from clearing operations to holding and building. The Marines supported the quick appointment of local officials to take advantage of the Taliban’s typical lull in fighting during the winter season when most were busy with overseeing the planting of poppies outside of the village.<sup>336</sup> In the early winter of 2011, a District Governor and Chief of Police were appointed in addition to elections for a district council of community representatives.<sup>337</sup> The District Community Council consists of 35 members, elected following an elders’ meeting in February 2011.<sup>338</sup> After the Marines defended the centre of the village around the District Governor’s compound, they then shifted some of their focus to conducting operations against Taliban cells on the outside of town.<sup>339</sup> At this relatively stable point in time, the Marine commands decided to simply recognize a village militia led with those that had previously been conducting a low-profile low-intensity insurrection against the Taliban. The militia was allowed autonomy.<sup>340</sup>

To reach this point of unleashing or allowing this anti-Taliban movement, that indigenous force required the freedom to stand, plan, and operate in the first place.

Militia members needed security enough to be free of Taliban intimidation and retribution. They needed security “breathing” space to independently seek their goals without facing immediate mutilation and execution.

In Marjah, Marines formally sanctioned what was known as “Local Defense Forces” (September 2010), later known as a “Neighborhood Watch Program” (November 2010), later known as the “Interim Security for Critical” (February 2011), later known as “Afghan Local Police” (September 2011), later known as “Interim Solutions for Critical Infrastructure” (February 2013).<sup>341</sup> The difference in each program was source of ISAF funding, salaries, and length of training, which was as much as three weeks. Funding in the first two years came from the local conventional U.S. military Commander’s Emergency Response Program, which also goes towards such projects as battle payments for accidental property damage and canal refurbishments.<sup>342</sup> The Afghan Ministry of the Interior is supposed to coordinate and oversee Afghan Local Police from the U.S. congressionally appropriated earmarked moneys—which often do not make it fully down to Afghan Local Police members.<sup>343</sup> At the sub-province level Afghan District Chiefs of Police are supposed to coordinate and be responsible for village-level Afghan Local Police.<sup>344</sup>

Locals were eventually able to farm licit nutritious crops and the numbers of Taliban attacks and threats decreased significantly in the years that followed this *arbakai*’s formation. Locals, GIRoA officials, U.S. military commanders, and U.S. civilian diplomatic and development personnel, in numerous disparate reports and interviews over a three-year period (from 2010 through 2013) saw Marjah become stable and secure enough for informal governance leaders to meet in public, school attendance rise,<sup>345</sup> and local fear of Taliban resurgence dwindle.<sup>346</sup> As the following chapters will present, Marjah’s *arbakai* played an important role to this security.

What motivated these volunteers will be investigated against prevailing hypotheses found from literature, military and development doctrine, and historical evidence in the next three chapters. First this study will test whether or not fighters served with the distinct goal of bringing stability to the region translating into security and education for those in Marjah. Then the study will uncover whether and perhaps how much of a role the Taliban ideology, and the materialization of this ideology into

violent attacks, acted as a motivation for the arbakai to form and fight. Finally, a third hypothesis will look to whether or not tribalism—in the case of Marjah a territorial based clan-system—functioned as a rallying cry for the volunteer civilian fighters. After the investigation of these hypotheses, the study will illuminate an overarching dominant theme that defined militiamen’s activities and aspirations.

## Chapter 4

### **Hypothesis: Marjah Arbakai Fight For Stability**

One motivation for the militiamen was the need for stability—specifically an end to chaos and civil war and the goal of education for youth. Every respondent during my interviews underlined the instability that Taliban had brought in the past to the town and the need for security, often with the end state of working towards viable schools for children. Other evidence such as military and development reports also strongly suggests that the Taliban in Marjah had brought feelings of instability and insecurity in recent history and that the arbakai were essential in creating an atmosphere of stabilization. The need for stability was not only a spoken narrative but was also a phenomenon for which the fighters toiled.

This chapter will first explore both literature and contemporary military doctrine suggesting that the desire for stability could potentially drive counter-violent-extremist movements—to underline that this is a viable hypothesis in the case of Marjah. It will then investigate the village guardians' interviews, of which all discussed the goal of stability buttressed by evidence of militiamen operating on this desire. Specifically, the chapter will investigate the villagers' two understandings of stability, which include an end to Taliban insecurity and the freedom of movement for children to be able to attend school. Although the hypothesis of stability as a goal proved correct in the case of Marjah, this notion does not preclude other drivers or master themes that drove the militia to fight and die, as later chapters will discuss. Instead, this chapter simply presents one of several themes of both the words and actions of Marjah's arbakai.

First, however, a definition of the term stability is necessary. Current military doctrine—as this chapter will further explore—has numerous lenses with which to view stability. ISAF, NATO, U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, and USAID publications and doctrine most often consider three criteria in understanding stability. First is a normal functioning of society, second is normal governance and adherence to laws, and third is a normal level of violence in any given area.<sup>347</sup> In summary, stability is whatever a community deems “normal,” according to prevailing military and economic development theories of stability operations.

The term “normal” in defining stability, however, will almost certainly differ in different areas of Afghanistan. In addition, moments of normality may not necessarily translate into overall sustainable stability. Therefore, the more nuanced understanding of stability for this chapter and study will include inherent adjectival caveats of “relative” and “enduring.” Relative, in this case, refers to the local perspective. Only the local through an indigenous optic and knowledge of local history and current affairs will be able to describe what relative stability is in his or her village. The term enduring refers to the capacity of the village to be able to maintain the norm and overcome future problems before such problems destabilize the area. Therefore stability, in this study, will focus on what those in Marjah consider to be a normal way of life—referring to a locally acceptable level of violence, adherence to law, and way of life—as well as the capacity of the village to maintain their normalcy in the future. In short, stability is relative and enduring normal life according to the views of the locals.

Outside forces will unlikely completely understand what stability is. Stability is in the eyes of the local. The only stability definition that matters is what locals perceive. In rural and tribal lands throughout Southwest Asia, the definition of stability very often changes dramatically from village to village and tribe to tribe—embedded in a local narrative even the best foreign anthropologist or best survey service cannot fully grasp.<sup>348</sup> Even if one was able to open a window into local perspectives, so many outside forces from environmental changes and crises to the very existence of alien security forces work to make definitions of stability a continually moving target. Many in war-torn rural areas may not even know what normal is.

Complicating the analysis of stability is the myriad of outside forces in many rural areas. From the perspective of most Afghans, there are many alien actors who may be threats or destabilizers.<sup>349</sup> The following is not an attempt to equate outside forces or the moral nature of such entities, but it is an attempt at broadly and simplistically describing the world from the viewpoint of an Afghan—no two Afghans sharing the same view. A Pashtun tribesman in Southwest Asia may view non-indigenous actors—such as non-local government representatives,<sup>350</sup> foreign NGOs, United States, foreign civilian advisors, local militias, non-local Afghan police, new poppy

traders, local and foreign contracted security companies, Quetta Shura Taliban, other Taliban elements, Haqqani Network, Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin, al-Qa`ida Central, al-Qa`ida branches, Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, and refugees from other areas<sup>351</sup>—as competitors, temporary partners, fleeting sources of money, enemies, or destabilizers.<sup>352</sup> For many there is no clear counterinsurgency environment. There may not even be clear “legitimate” actors versus “illegitimate” actors vying for power over a population.

As such, this understanding of stability, for this study, points up the counterinsurgency theories, discussed in the literature review of the first chapter, that emphasize leveraging clans. Stability, being all but impossible for an outsider to completely comprehend, logically places weight on trusting locals to provide the definition of what is considered normal. On the other hand, a heavier approach to counterinsurgency, in which artificial militias play an ancillary role, might focus on absolute government control instead of the perspectives of locals.

With this understanding of stability that takes into account local perspectives and the capacity to maintain normal life into the future, this chapter will first look to theory and doctrine of the goal of stability as a potential motivation for counter-violent-extremism movements. One major theme in studies of the modern history of violent extremist groups centres on the phenomenon that insurgencies, to include violent extremist movements that oppose governments, are normally forces of instability. Twentieth century studies have even led to multiple tactical, operational, strategic, and policy-level doctrines that have informed and compelled NATO operations in Afghanistan to include in the fields of development, diplomacy, and security—all based on the idea that the goal of stability is a goal of civil society and all those who oppose violent extremists.

#### **4.1 Violent Extremists Destabilize**

Modern counterinsurgency and counterterrorism theories view insurgency—to include, in some studies, today's violent extremist insurgencies—as inherently destabilizing. David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*



begins with Clausewitz' quotation that "[i]nsurgency is the pursuit of the policy of a party, inside a country, by every means" to underline that insurgency is by definition destabilizing—"every means possible" brings to mind possible boundless destruction and death to which he later implies.<sup>353</sup> Galula states that an insurgency's beginning is vague and cannot be predicted but becomes a protracted and innately destabilizing "struggle."<sup>354</sup> While a counterinsurgency may have the responsibility of bringing and keeping social order, the insurgency will try to create disorder to undermine the efficacy of the government.<sup>355</sup> Specifically, an insurgent attempts to dissociate the populace from the government: "Promoting disorder is a legitimate objective for the insurgent...disorder—the normal state of nature—is cheap to create and very costly to prevent." The insurgent need not have one constructive social policy to win.<sup>356</sup> Galula's theories, steeped in historical precedent, could, in theory, apply to the Taliban along with other transnational insurrections affecting Afghanistan. However, Galula does not differentiate different types of insurgencies nor describes an area like Afghanistan comprising thousands of semi-autonomous communities with different types of ties to insurgency.

David Kilcullen suggests that eradicating instability should be a focus of counterinsurgency and that the Taliban create, exacerbate, and take advantage of instability. Challenging NATO units to focus on root sources of instability, he recommends that military units refocus their staff to understand and plan to mitigate causes of instability as opposed to only killing militants.<sup>357</sup> He concludes that NATO should strategically organize and conduct operations to mitigate instability, as if instability were inherent to the Taliban identity and its actions. Kilcullen explains that destabilizing factors are so great that NATO must make an effort to ensure that measures of success should focus almost entirely on improvements in stabilization.<sup>358</sup>

Specifically, Kilcullen recommends that foreign military units in Afghanistan set and continually measure observable data to judge success against the Taliban such as unsolicited reporting from the population (since the populace would only report voluntarily if they feel secure), improvised explosive devices reported versus found, price of exotic vegetables (since low prices may mean accessible roads), transportation prices, the number of Taliban versus government courts, Afghan on Afghan violence (to judge local legitimate policing), business formation and loan

repayments, land ownership, civilian ability to travel, and rate of anti-insurgent militia formation.<sup>359</sup> The final metric may be an important measurement for foreign counterinsurgent forces in because such a militia could continue past NATO withdrawal. An anti-insurgent militia risks life, limb, money, and power revealing deep dedication that could potentially last past foreign troop withdrawal.<sup>360</sup>

Galula and Kilcullen project that insurgents are inherently destabilizing but do not explore whether or not instability could be a cause for civilians to take up arms against anti-government entities. Nor do these theorists provide a convincing account of what stability might resemble to a person that lives in a unique country like Afghanistan—each Afghan perhaps having a different view of the world, politics, and the Taliban depending on his or her life experiences through the prism of a local community. Nevertheless, modern war theory of countering violent extremism hinges on these authors' understanding of insurgents so much so that operations in Afghanistan eventually focused primarily on mitigating sources of instability even as operators continue to also kill or capture violent extremists.<sup>361</sup>

The destabilizing nature of Taliban and assumption that locals wish for stability informed the military and economic development doctrine of NATO in Afghanistan. Doctrine then birthed specific frameworks for small and large military units alike to follow to lessen instability as if this were the most effective method to weaken Taliban presence, influence, and ability to operate.

#### **4.2 Stability in Military Doctrine**

The idea of stability became so central to doctrine that the term formally appears in the name of overall NATO actions in Afghanistan and elsewhere.<sup>362</sup> Stability operations are the coined term that applies to numerous environments and situations to include the possible destabilizing result of the death of a key leader, the aftermath of a natural disaster, and an insurgency. In one way, counterinsurgency is a subset of stability operations. Through this particular lens, the focus on the insurgency itself is but one piece of the problem set, while stabilizing areas within and outside insurgent-rich areas is the main effort.<sup>363</sup>

Operations and doctrine in Afghanistan assume that the Taliban are destabilizers and claim that stability should be the end state.<sup>364</sup> In the final five years of ISAF's presence in Afghanistan, the term "stability operations" has most commonly been used to describe international military efforts and those of civilian government diplomatic and development counterparts.<sup>365</sup> It is the all encompassing umbrella term for activities, which in theory would meet the President of the United States, U.S. Secretary of State, ISAF Commander, U.S. Chief of Mission, and NATO's end state for Afghanistan.<sup>366</sup> incapacitate violent Taliban elements and impel an enduring impermissible environment from transnational violent extremist insurrections who could otherwise wage attacks against the United States and/or U.S. allies.<sup>367</sup> Stability operations comprise the focus of many counterterrorism missions, demobilization/reintegration strategies, and counterinsurgency whether in the reconnaissance, shape, clear, hold, build, expand, over-watch, drawdown, or transition phases.<sup>368</sup>

The premise is that that Taliban and other insurgent forces in Afghanistan are competing with traditional leaders—to include religious leaders, village leaders, familial leaders, and heads of clans and tribes—as well as the government to control or influence the population. The population will side with whatever side offers more stability, according to the government publications. The strategy does not defeat the Taliban itself but instead defeats its supposed core strength of popular support.<sup>369</sup> Such an approach can be likened to manoeuvre warfare in which the population is the centre of gravity<sup>370</sup>—on which the insurgency counts for safe haven, some type of support, and potential recruits—while the sources of instability are critical vulnerabilities.<sup>371</sup> Mitigate these critical vulnerabilities, the theory supposes, and insurrection loses the populace and loses the war.

For Afghanistan, the NATO and ISAF mandated tool to conduct stability operations was originally called the District Stability Framework (DSF), which is a misnomer because this is a doctrinal framework not just for district-level activities but tailored for all tactical, operational, strategic, and special operations as well as all civil affairs and reconstruction teams in Afghanistan. The Secretary of Defense and Commander of ISAF both mandated that all manoeuvre, special operations, USAID, and civil affairs units and teams deploying to Afghanistan must receive DSF training. Regional

Command East ordered for all units to conduct DSF precisely as trained, and many other units throughout Afghanistan also apply DSF as the primary methodology to conduct stability operations.<sup>372</sup> The Marjah district governor's staff even conducted thorough training on DSF during the summer of 2011 and applied this style of stability operations when conducting some activities in Marjah.<sup>373</sup> By late fall 2012 there were numerous manifestations of DSF for the U.S. Chief of Mission civilians to include USAID Office of Democracy and Governance's Stabilization Unit Stability in Key Areas and USAID Office of Transition Initiatives' stabilization methodologies which are both simply streamlined versions of the original DSF.<sup>374</sup>

DSF and its more recent manifestations, using similar language and the same theories broadly have three sequential steps.<sup>375</sup> They challenged operators, staff, and practitioners to identify sources of instability, then to analyse systemic causes of instability, and finally to conduct activities and measure impact of such projects.<sup>376</sup>

*Identify Sources of Instability:* Before uncovering the sources of instability that would need to be eradicated or lessened, stability operations analysts are required to understand and assess stabilization writ large. Contemporary doctrine considers numerous lenses to view stability to include:

- normal activities of society, governance functioning, adherence to laws, respect for authority, and level of crime and warfare in any given area<sup>377</sup>
- whatever a particular community believes stability is with an understanding that each community may have a different definition<sup>378</sup>
- the ability of a community to overcome its own sources of instability and grievances<sup>379</sup>
- the absence or effective mitigation of sources of instability<sup>380</sup>

Despite numerous lenses of stability, there are defined criteria for identifying sources of instability. Doctrinally, they are a type of priority grievance, which is a need that a majority or plurality of locals believe is the most important problem facing the entire community. From a list of identified priority grievances, the commander, analyst, or staff assesses which meet the three criteria to be a source of instability: decrease support for governance, increase support for insurgency and other malign actors, and weaken societal capacity.<sup>381</sup>

*Analyse Systemic Causes of Instability:* The stabilization standard frameworks then demand that practitioners uncover a number of systemic causes of instability for each source of instability by investigating how the issue came about, why it is continuing, and why communities have not addressed the problem themselves. The purpose for analysing the root causes that allow sources of instability is they will determine activities to mitigate instability.<sup>382</sup>

*Conduct Activities and Measure Impact:* The theory is that outsiders directly conducting, overseeing, or paying for programs<sup>383</sup> to address systemic causes of instability will resolve the source of instability. When sources of instability are mitigated, then the community will be stable, according to the framework. The prevailing methodologies call for outside military operators to enter rural Afghanistan villages and conduct activities directly or fund projects.<sup>384</sup> While tenets of DSF offer options to hire local labour or partner with Afghans, the emphasis is most often on NATO conducting, funding, or directly overseeing those actions that would strengthen and measure overall stability.<sup>385</sup>

The assumption behind this process is that stability will keep the Taliban at bay. However, there is little data to assess how well the program is working despite several on-going studies.<sup>386</sup> The execution of DSF and its newer streamlined iterations is without serious academic, policy, or operational critical evaluation.<sup>387</sup> Those studies that have begun would be hard pressed to tie successes or failures of DSF to an area that stabilizes or destabilizes because of the myriad of non-ISAF-related environmental as well as international, regional, and local events and influences that can affect an area's stabilization. DSF is an untested playbook, and DSF's primary assumption that stability would undercut the Taliban is unproven.

Even if stability were primary to weakening violent extremist efforts and if DSF's mentality of outsiders primarily conducting stabilization operations, the doctrine holds inherent potential weaknesses. For example, NATO frameworks do not offer viable approaches to uncover local perspectives of stability or to allow locals to build enduring capacity to overcome their own problems autonomously in the future.

The doctrine holds little room to empower local indigenous resilient actors, who have anti-violent-extremist sentiment such as Marjah's *arbakai*.<sup>388</sup> U.S. security and development publications do not address how to identify or address sources of stability but instead elect to focus entirely on mitigating sources of instability.<sup>389</sup> Within the stability operations doctrinal planning process, operators and planners are given labyrinthine matrices and hundreds of steps. Amidst the myriad of steps and 14 matrices, planners are only given one column of one matrix to even consider indigenous resilient systems. Then the analyst is told to consider—as one of eight program principles—working with resiliencies when it is time to pay money for a project or activity. At best, resiliency is a footnote in the long DSF process, which often demanded two weeks of training in the United States before deploying to Afghanistan. The framework does not offer a definition of or steps to identity a resiliency or more specifically traditional rural resilient governance structures.<sup>390</sup> Such a mindset underlines the framework's weakness in building local enduring capacity to overcome future challenges.

In conclusion, stabilization frameworks, without evidence of success, fall short of recognizing sources of stability or local resilient actors who are already attempting to stabilize areas or counter violent extremists with autonomy. Nevertheless, ISAF, even as it moves to over-watch and withdrawal operate as if stability is the central issue in Afghanistan. Even the term stability operations underline a narrative that drives ISAF planning and action. Thus the focus of stability as a goal for NATO along with academic research on the destabilizing effects of insurgency underlines the viability of hypothesizing that stability could be a goal of those in Marjah.

However, whether stability could be a similar driving force and narrative for indigenous counter-extremist fighters, such as those in Marjah, has not yet been a subject of serious study. Therefore, this study will now test this hypothesis by investigating the words, actions, and effects of civilian guardians in this rural village in southern Helmand. The following section will analyse whether, and if so in what way, anti-Taliban civilian fighters use stability as a rallying cry and whether and how these *arbakai* volunteers' actions reveal the goal of stability.

### 4.3 Arbakai Fight for Stability

Every interview respondent independently, without leading questions, announced the goal of stability as the primary reason why they rose up and fought Taliban. The most common definition, to locals, of stability in Marjah includes security—specifically the absence of the chaos and violence that the Taliban caused—as well as access to education. This ubiquitous narrative—displayed with words and actions—appeared to drive all fighters. They saw the Taliban as destabilizers who brought no constructive contributions to the town but instead only war and in turn wished to single handedly end the trend of instability.

The words civilian militiamen used were not of some broad idea of instability. Instead, each Marjah militiaman and civilian I interviewed equated the Taliban to *fitna*. None used the word *fitna*, but each described its meaning without equivocation. *Fitna* refers to disorder, sedition, or civil strife.<sup>391</sup> Historically and theologically, *fitna* refers to a period of Hobbesian-like chaos when rebellion against established order brings insecurity and instability to the community writ large.<sup>392</sup> Every arbakai member interviewed stated that the Taliban were a materialization of *fitna*.

All interviewees stated that the Taliban brought war and destruction. The following quotations do not correspond to specific interview questions because respondents told stories about their reasons for fighting throughout the questioning often independent of a particular query. Furthermore, interviewees most often spoke about numerous themes when speaking about an idea. Thus answers often revealed holistic and emotional views that rarely focused on a single point. The numbers after quotations refer to a specific respondent, whose full answers, numbered according, are in appendix A. In this section, the answers are representative of all the interviews on thoughts of the Taliban bringing chaos, insecurity, and fighting:

*Fighting. That's what they brought. That's what the Taliban are. We cannot have this in our town. We cannot allow this. We did not cause this fighting. Instead, the Taliban came and brought it upon us. [Their name] means violence. And they bring violence right into our very neighbourhoods...[t]he entire town feels the same way I do. Everyone here, everyone around you here, feels that the Taliban are nothing*

*more than fighting. They are fighting. And no one here wants this. – (103)*

*The Taliban mean destruction only. They are against the very social fabric of this town. The Taliban are our direct enemy. This is clear, of course. When the Taliban are here that means that there is fighting here. The Taliban are fighting. The Taliban mean fighting. They are conflict. If they are here, there is by very definition conflict here. The Taliban are not Afghan. They do not comprise Afghans nor is their origin Afghan in any way. They are from Pakistan. And they are our enemies. Pakistan is our enemy too. [The Taliban] are against families. They are against the family—my family and the idea of family. I want to help people. I want to support a constructive society and help my community. I will fight on until I make my country safe and build up Afghanistan. And as long as there is Taliban, they are an impediment to this. It is my duty to fight them as long as it takes and support development and constructive policies. My children feel that education is very important. They want education. This is very important for them. They want to go to school and earn degrees to work. They have clear visions for this. They understand what they want from this day forward. And the Taliban would never allow this. The Taliban would never allow education or my kids to go to school, and my children very much understand this clearly. – (99)*

Such notions were reflected throughout the interviews. Marjah guardians brought up similar themes of destruction, strife, and chaos when describing Taliban as these select notions represent:

*Everyday there was fighting...[they] caused strife amongst the community...Taliban brought fighting amongst society. – (67)*

*The Taliban only brought strife. – (79)*

*They essentially broke our town. They came here and brought death...They did not nor could they build up anything or create any type of societal self-sufficiency. They only break and destroy things...this is what they are—breakers and destroyers only. – (101)*

*The Taliban do not want security or peace in Afghanistan, especially Marjah. – (50)*

*The Taliban are against peace. They do not want or allow peace. They are against Afghanistan improving. – (61)*

*The Taliban bring a lot of fighting. They cause many many [sic] casualties. They broke our country. – (88)*



*They destroyed schools and bridges and did not want peace. They only bring destruction and war. – (7)*

*The Taliban do not want security. They do not want to improve Afghanistan. They offer nothing but destruction...The Taliban take everyone hostage. – (8)*

*They want nothing but fighting. They are essentially bringers of fighting. – (108)*

*The Taliban only want to fight. I do not want this fighting. – (53)*

*[The Taliban] want to destroy, use bombs, and hurt people only. – (55)*

*...Taliban only brings fighting. – (82)*

*They only want destruction and killing. – (111)*

According to the views of guardians, Taliban not only bring civil war, chaos, and killing, but their very identity somehow inherently embodies violence and insecurity. Taliban's time in Marjah and surrounding areas was a time of cruelty and battles. Violent extremists targeted civilians, elders, and children; they sometimes attempted to empower one tribe to subjugate another only to eventually turn on the tribe they initially empowered; and their presence inevitably brought ISAF and national security forces into the area with civilians and civilian households in the crossfire. Pigeonholing local Taliban into the category of fitna points up theories of the history of Islam as a continuous fight between fitna and forces for order.<sup>393</sup> In line with this general and perhaps even simplistic view of Islamic history, locals seemed to see the world as black and white—either fitna or no fitna. Violent extremists who kill civilians, spark government repression, cause foreign invasions, and start civil war harm Muslim society through this fitna.

Others spoke to a sudden shift from stability of local friendly governance to violence once the Taliban took over the village. Anti-Taliban militia volunteers felt that the insecurity violent extremists brought was an aberration from normalcy and perhaps even a worsened instability than the decades prior to the Taliban that saw civil war and Soviet interference:

*Before the Taliban, the block elder would solve all the local problems for the people. But when the Taliban came, they arrested people,*

*handed out bread, and taxed locals—to control the populace without any regard for the traditional leadership. The Taliban asked me to join them, and I said no. They killed people. They destroyed a bridge. They destroyed my village. So I took up my gun and fought the Taliban. And I swear my opposition to the Taliban with my gun. My gun is my oath. The Taliban are against peace, and we are against the Taliban. The Taliban are against peace and security. They are the enemy. They only want insecurity and conflict. This is what they have brought and want to bring again. All people here want the Taliban destroyed. The locals around here want security and peace. As long as the Taliban are unable or unwilling to be educated to be allowed back into society, then we will fight them...All people here oppose the Taliban to include all kids. We are all against the Taliban—children and adults alike. – (6)*

*We are peaceful here. We did not bring this on ourselves. We did not ask for the Taliban's invasion, and the violence that they brought. We were already here. We did not go to another country and start fighting there. It was brought upon us. – (100)*

Most interviewees also suggested that the Taliban was incapable of constructive governance or development. They claim that violent extremists' very nature is inherently destructive and cannot provide the security that the fighters appeared to seek:

*Taliban are destroying our country. The Taliban really equal destruction and nothing constructive. They only want to wreck my country. They come from Pakistan mainly, as well as get help from Iran. They also want to destroy our infrastructure. They want us to be destroyed from the inside out. From schools to roads to clinics, the Taliban only want conflict. They only want war. Taliban do not allow people in schools, and have put IEDs in schools and clinics. They do not want Afghanistan to improve. They do not want individuals to improve their lives nor do they want us as a society to improve ourselves. We want to fight all the Taliban because they do not have constructive policies. The Taliban do not want peace. They do not work for anything good or positive. They bring conflict, and we must stop this. We must stop their destruction. We will offer peace with the Taliban first, and if they do not want it is a good thing for us to fight all of the Taliban. As long as they stay outside society and only want conflict, they will be the enemies of Afghanistan. And as long as they are the enemies of Afghanistan, we will fight them continuously. There is no end, for me or for my children, as long as the Taliban seek only destruction. – (2)*

*The Taliban do not want Afghanistan to improve. They come in the night from Pakistan and have killed some of the local elders. This is*

*why I oppose and fight them. I joined the militia because we help Afghanistan. We bring peace to Afghanistan. We secure the locals. This is why I serve in the way I do. People don't want the Taliban. Taliban do not allow peace. They do not allow children to go to school. They do not allow asphalt on the road. They do not allow betterment of roads. They do not allow clinics. They do not allow school. We will fight a long time. If they join us then that would be good. The others that do not give up we will kill and remove from Afghanistan. But if they choose peace and join us then that would be good. Otherwise we will kill, remove, and fight. – (18)*

*The Taliban do not want peace. Also, Taliban do not want schools or roads or to improve Afghanistan. They bring only war and conflict. They do not want us to live together peacefully. They do not want us to improve as a society. It is therefore necessary for us to fight the Taliban. We must fight the Taliban. This is necessary. This has to happen. Also, Pakistan supports the Taliban to disturb Afghanistan. The weapons are from Pakistan, and the Taliban are mostly outsiders so we can recognize them. We know when someone is not from our block. We know when someone from Pakistan is walking around amidst our homes. In Afghanistan there are two types of people: The majority who want peace, schools, and clinics. And then there are the others who take the side of the Taliban. It is this second group who is wedded to fighting and misery—who do not join the police, who do not want to be self-sufficient, who do not want to improve our communities. We ought to speak with the Taliban and show them the positive and constructive progress of Afghanistan. To invite them to join society—show them schools and clinics and the importance of families, children, and babies. Perhaps they will not fight if they see all this. Perhaps they could not fight after seeing this. But if they fail to change then we must fight the Taliban. We must fight the Taliban for a long time because they are likely bent on fighting the entire Afghan people. They appear, in reality, to want to fight everyone inside Afghanistan for quite a while. So we will have to fight if they never want peace. My son and my daughter go to school. The Taliban would never allow them to do this. So it is ingrained in their mind to be against the Taliban at a very young age. They hate the Taliban. Children want something that the Taliban would fight to deny. – (3)*

These above representative oral stories illustrate the passionate anger and distrust of the failed policies and instability that the Taliban had previously brought Marjah. Such notions were far from empty words. They jibe with a stream of evidence that the Taliban brought only unconstructive governance and perceived wanton punishment. Mullah Omar and the teachers of the violence-allowing “informal” quasi-neo-Deobandi Pakistani madrassas have no specificity, acumen, or constructive planning or paradigm for governance<sup>394</sup> While the Quetta Shura Taliban leadership

claim that the answer to the world's problem is Islam—and likewise an Islamic state under Islamic rules is the only way forward—no specific solutions are available from the words and websites of violent extremist talking heads.<sup>395</sup> From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban governed most of the land in Afghanistan, “[b]ut destroying graves, stoning women, and cutting off the hands of thieves took precedence over education, usable roads, agricultural aid, and the common missions of any serious government.”<sup>396</sup>

Unable to practice any semblance of tradition qawm governance, count on their village elders to provide justice and security, or live as they had since the 1960s, Marjahns viscerally despised Taliban.<sup>397</sup> The Taliban fought and killed people in their houses and near their compounds. Taliban would show up to family compounds unannounced and take food, money, and property; lob off the head of the first person who refused to pay taxes as an example to others;<sup>398</sup> and turned farms into poppy growing machines and markets to morphine/opium/heroin emporiums.<sup>399</sup> Any civilian who winced at the Taliban's laws and authority were gruesomely punished in public.<sup>400</sup> The full force of the concerted instability may have come from Taliban's top ranks: Marjah became so important to Taliban central leadership in Quetta that they called for a “jihad” against anyone in Marjah who disobeyed or took up arms against violent extremists.<sup>401</sup> Effectively violent extremists erased any qawm system of governance in Marjah, and surviving traditional block elders stood by silently or fled to Helmand's provincial capital Lashkargah or Pakistan.

It should be noted that during Taliban's original reign in Afghanistan—to include being the main governing body of Helmand and the rest of the country's south—in the 1990s there is little evidence that the Taliban had disrupted local governance systems in the village to the same degree as 2005-2010. Marjahns neither spoke about this earlier period nor about the initial days that the Taliban entered Marjah in 2005 to “protect” citizens from secular drug lords. Possible reasons for the silence during these time periods include initial Taliban respect for the qawm leaders who mostly had been proven legendary anti-Soviet mujahidin warriors, who later returned to Marjah, many apparently without taking sides during the civil war. Another explanation is that most of the militiamen were young—likely between 19 and 25 years old, as this researcher observed—unlikely remembering the original Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Yet one more possibility—not necessarily obviating the other

reasons—was that locals may have colluded with or at least allowed Taliban rule in the 1990s and perhaps even at outset of their 2005 resurgence. It seemed only when figures such as Mullah Dadullah Akhund, known as “the Butcher” of Helmand and the “Abu Musab al-Zarqawi” of areas like Marjah<sup>402</sup> (more details on him and his violent cells in the subsequent chapters), along with heightened intensity of Taliban repression did the religious and cultural fissures and local hatred grow. (Such a notion points up the possibility that locals may accept demobilized Taliban in the future.)

Between 2005 and 2012, Military reports of insurgent numbers varied from 1,000<sup>403</sup> to 20,000 Taliban in Helmand.<sup>404</sup> With this number of Taliban—who killed and tortured with impunity—the normal way of life was not possible. Taliban forced locals to shave beards, adhere only to the local Taliban commanders on all matter of justice and governance. The Taliban would even come into homes and steal food and supplies without asking—sometimes even reportedly disrespecting wives, mothers, and daughters. Compared to the days when block elders protected and cared for their qawm and farmers farmed crops locals could eat, the village was far from stable. This phenomenon came across emotionally in the interviews.

The theme of ending fitna was not only an emotional criticism but also turned into a call for action. Beyond this critique, Marjah’s indigenous forces saw themselves as a vanguard against an invading army of murderers who want nothing more than fighting and death. According to militiamen’s words, the era of the Taliban was an age of fighting and cruelty, and it is they, the militiamen, who alone will bring Marjah and Afghanistan out of the age of fighting and cruelty. This almost mythical-sounding storyline that the few hundred arbakai of Marjah would singlehandedly end an era of fitna appears to be a grandiose and exaggerated call for local security. The strategic story materializes into a measurable and realistic goal: a few hundred arbakai members who operate in addition to ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces could indeed realistically increase security in these 56 square kilometres of land.

As an answer to this perceived fitna, local fighters spoke about the need to autonomously effect security.<sup>405</sup> Militiamen appeared not to fight just for the sake of fighting. But instead, paradoxically, they wished to fight in order to put an end to

warfare—to stop fitna. This dedication became clear when they kept peace and security in the village neighbourhoods as well as when they conducted operations to run down and kill Taliban cells with hunter-killer teams outside the village proper.<sup>406</sup> Not one interviewee considered the arbakai's aggressive fighting adding to civil war. Instead militiamen saw killing Taliban as necessary to safety for civilians:

*We do not want fighting. And all the Taliban want is fighting. That's all they want. That's what they are—conflict. That is what defines the Taliban. The Taliban are fighting. The Taliban are conflict. Don't you understand this? My wives and girls did not like the Taliban. The Taliban disrespected them and brought dishonour on them, which is the same as brining dishonour on my and on my whole community. They took and did what they want with them. This makes me unhappy. This is very disrespectful—to disrespect the women of my family. You surely understand this. The Taliban would only bring fighting. They could only mean conflict. This is what the Taliban are: conflict. I am dedicated to fight and kill the Taliban—all of the Taliban—for my entire life or until they are literally completely run out of Afghanistan. My children are the same as me. They will rebel against the Taliban until they are entirely gone. They will fight with dedication, passion, and resolve until the Taliban is erased. Until they are deleted from Afghanistan. – (102)*

*We do not like the Taliban. They do not allow security and are against security, knowledge, and education...Before this arbakai, things were no good. The Taliban were everywhere and destroyed everything for me. They hurt my family and my brother. They came to my family's compound at night to stay in the wintertime. More and more people joined the ALP so that the Taliban would not be in Marjah. To drive the Taliban from Marjah. The Taliban came to compounds at night. And they forced us to pay them money. I will fight until there is peace in Marjah. Until peace is in place. My son will take over the security role to secure Marjah. – (57)*

*...safety and security is our most immediate goal. – (107)*

*I will fight until I feel security. – (67)*

*I will fight until I truly feel freedom and security. – (72)*

*I fight the Taliban because I want peace. I want a future of freedom. – (77)*

*We returned to bring security. – (44)*

*I wanted to figure out how to bring security to my area. – (45)*

*The children want security. – (112)*

*I do not like fighting. I do not like war. But this is necessary because I want freedom. – (105)*

Many respondents placed special emphasis on eradicating insecurity on behalf of and from the entire nation. The interviewees seem to wish for the end to instability not only in the village of Marjah but also for the entire country of Afghanistan—to wish for the strategic defeat of all Afghanistan-based Taliban:

*Everyone who lives here in Marjah, and all of Helmand hates the Taliban. The Taliban do not want Afghanistan to improve. The Taliban only want war. They bring only fighting. They offer nothing for us to improve. We will fight the Taliban for a long, long time. The Taliban have only two options. Either they can join society, or we will kill them all. My children are all against the Taliban, because my kids want peace. I talk to them every day about the Taliban. My children do not want fighting and seek only peace, education, and schools. – (7)*

*Because the Taliban know that we have projects and good works they are against us. They are against any of our efforts to improve ourselves. They don't want construction. They would not allow development of any kind. They only want destruction and killing. They fight us. They came and fought where we live. We did not ask for this. They came to us and brought fighting. I fight because I want security and education. It is that simple. They see the village is being productive. And they do not like this. So they bring fighting to our homes and to our fields. And so we are all against their fighting. We cannot allow this. All the time that the Taliban are here in our country I will fight them. If they are breathing. If they are operating. If they are physically in Afghanistan, then I will fight them to the death. This is how dedicated I am. Truthfully. When they are older, my children, they will have education. They will support and help the government. They will support and help the military. – (111)*

*I think that the people here feel the same as me. They want a safe and secure Afghanistan. They feel a need—a calling—to serve Afghanistan and to keep it safe from the Taliban...And safety and security is our immediate goal. – (107)*

Such aspirations—bringing security to the area in which they operate—appears a practical fulfilment of their grander ideal of ending some sort of nation-wide age of fitna. While Marjah arbakai spoken words are perhaps grandiose, members' ambitions appear feasible. At least in part, the militia's dedicated and dangerous actions<sup>407</sup> appeared to earn greater security. The regimental commander of southern

Afghanistan stated in February 2012 that the Marjah arbakai were the most effective counterinsurgency local force in his area of operations of southern Helmand and perhaps Afghanistan.<sup>408</sup> His predecessor stated that once arbakai stood up significant events, such as small arms fires and coordinated attacks by enemies, went from 20-30 a day to zero or almost zero in southern Marjah proper almost overnight. Taliban attacks appeared to move to outside the town centre.<sup>409</sup> Another commander stated that he felt “a lot more comfortable walking around here than Baltimore after eight o’clock at night.”<sup>410</sup>

With arbakai patrolling the town and its outskirts,<sup>411</sup> local civilians felt safe enough to report insurgent movements and locations of mines and improvised explosive devices, causing yet more security. Citizens felt there was ample security to hold shuras with the Marines and travel to the district centre for reimbursement for damaged private property during initial battles. Markets opened and regularly sold drinks, snacks, and electronics. Most locals were no longer cowering in fear of Taliban retribution or in fear of being caught in the cross fire between insurgents and ISAF. There was little overall fear, and civilians felt comfortable to have Marine civil affairs teams directly approach them.<sup>412</sup> Residents appeared to turn back to pre-Taliban type farming and were tending to cotton and wheat crops.<sup>413</sup> As of November 2010, reportedly approximately 300 young persons were attending classes. Ten-year-old student Zaar Waali said, “[n]ow our people have also taken up arms not to let the Taliban prevent us from going to school. I am very happy that I can study now.”<sup>414</sup> Also the permissible environment reportedly allowed medical personnel to provide services to locals such as polio vaccinations.<sup>415</sup> Medical worker Haji Mullah stated that he had been able to execute a concerted vaccination campaign “without fearing for his life.”<sup>416</sup>

The following interview respondent spoke of this change from instability to a societal capacity that allowed the village to operate constructively and independently. He underlined the change from brutality of a perceived alien violent extremist force to a current life in which security and stability pervade:

*I suffered a lot under Taliban rules. The Taliban are not well educated. They are in the hands of Pakistan and Iran who pay them.*



*They are cruel and no one will follow until the Taliban spreads terror. They used to kill one person to get taxes from everyone—making that one person an example. And this becomes propaganda that spreads outward. They would make an example of one person for the community over someone who refuses to grow poppy for or give food to the Taliban. A person who loves the human race feels respect to do something for that place. He will be loyal t that place. The Taliban made people worse than animals. People were uneducated. So one educated person would come along—if he does something good then this is an opportunity. But the next day the Taliban would kill or kidnap this person. Or he would disappear or flee. Marjah used to be heaven for drug lords, smugglers, killers, kidnappers. The Taliban's main income was smuggling. Shops used to only sell opium. Any program where guns and bullets are involved needs money. They support themselves with drugs, and use this money to kill families and destroy lives. It is money for destruction. These days are like eid (holiday). Children can go to school. You can see it on their faces. But it doesn't quite feel as good as the early days. After Operation Mosharak, all the shops are now busy, and the economy is booming. Now there are tractors and motorbikes. This was impossible before. Before there was one guy with a tractor on this piece of land. Now each of his cousins has a tractor. Before you couldn't walk because of the dust. Now the roads are better. There are solar powered lights. Now the city is calm. Before an old person would be beaten if the Taliban needed to collect food from him. Now he can walk and drive and bike around. Before the power was not given to the block elders. They were the most wanted by the Taliban. It was a cat and mouse game...Islam is a religion of friendship and peace. It is not a religion of killing someone in the middle of the street. They talk about the Prophet, may God keep him. But Islam is like water. It can drown you or save your life. If someone is already a bad guy then he will twist the truth. Before a woman could not go to bazaar without a man. Doesn't matter if she needs medicine. Now kids are going to school again. It doesn't matter if people are street vendors, doctors, or professors—everyone sends their kids to school and share stories with one another about their kids in school. The Taliban captured Marjah in 2009. And Marjah suffered more than the rest of Afghanistan. So now Marjah deserves more good things for itself. – (52)*

Supporting this local viewpoint was that of ISAF's village civilian team of foreign diplomats and development professionals. According to these British and U.S. civilians, District Community Council members would cover their faces when walking into meetings fearing Taliban identification and retribution in January 2011. In sharp contrast, by the summer of that year, councilmen walked to the District Governor's office without hiding—a sign of improved security. The Marjah District Stability team stated on 17 July 2011:<sup>417</sup>

*The [District Stability Team's Rule of Law] advisors recently referred to Marjah as "blossoming."*

*AND WHY – because security allows civil society to function normally and GIRoA, supported by the coalition, is acting as gardener encouraging cooperation and growth...*

*Security within Marjah proper has increased markedly and is being pushed out to the last remaining areas of enemy influence on the periphery. ALP training academies graduating [arbakai] members. DCOP's security forces have at least doubled.*

*There have been remarkable advances on all fronts, but it wasn't six months ago that candidates for the DCC covered their faces when they entered the District Center, civilians refused to drive to Lashkar Gah, bazaars were quiet and Marjah was considered unsafe. The "New Marjah" is perceived to be safe, but the catch phrase, "fragile and reversible," applies. If security were to deteriorate, then the dramatic, remarkable advancements I comment on today would fade as quickly as the dream made possible by the Marines.*

To this day, villagers continue to support and enjoy the freedom to attend schools, repair derelict canals, and visit health clinic that security provides. Locals overwhelmingly feel that the arbakai are the most effective force to provide this security, will continue to provide security after ISAF withdrawal, and encourage the government to provide arbakai further resources such as more modern weapons and ammunition. Villagers believe that the arbakai, and not national soldiers and cops, foremost bring this freedom of movement and perceived security.<sup>418</sup>

Another rough indicator of security is ISAF death count. U.S. Marine Corps Regimental Command Team (RCT) 7 (May 2009 – June 2010) suffered 74 deaths, 70 of whom were U.S. Marines. RCT-1 (July 2010 – August 2011) suffered 32 dead of whom 31 were U.S. Marines, and RCT-5 (September 2011 – September 2012) had one death as of 5 December 2011.<sup>419</sup> However, such numbers can be somewhat deceiving as many Marines and ISAF civilians in and near Marjah lost limbs—a possible intentional effect of Taliban anti-personnel improvised explosive devices<sup>420</sup>—to include a number of triple amputees.<sup>421</sup> Nevertheless, at best the Taliban could launch infrequent fire-and-run attacks as squad elements.<sup>422</sup> For example, the Taliban boldly laid in two IEDs within two hundred meters of the

District Governor's compound in October 2011 and conducted a failed suicide-bomber operation against the District Compound in June 2011.<sup>423</sup> Even though security improved significantly once the *arbakai* stood up, rare incursions, kidnappings, and intimidation continued especially outside of the village proper.<sup>424</sup> Marjah's militia likely played a role in achieving relative stability, but a lasting low threat from Taliban required the civilian volunteers continue to operate.

Yet one more indication of Marjah *arbakai* actions helping to achieve relative security was the reaction from the top Taliban leadership in Quetta, Pakistan over the village's militiamen along with similar uprisings.<sup>425</sup> The Taliban have conducted a concerted three-pronged strategy. First, Quetta Shura Taliban attempted to undermine the anti-Taliban uprisings' claims of independence with the ultimate goal of lessening popular support of such militias in Afghanistan.<sup>426</sup> Specifically the Taliban used terms in radio and online forums to describe the counter-violent-extremist movements such as "government orchestrated,"<sup>427</sup> "mercenar[ies] from Kabul,"<sup>428</sup> "crusader spies" and the "scum of Afghan society."<sup>429</sup> Second, the Taliban has attempted to misinform GIRoA and ISAF through pushing rumours that the militias were actually related to the insurgency and anti-government in nature—an attempt to give ISAF and GIRoA leaders pause over supporting such grassroots movements.<sup>430</sup> Third, violent extremist have continued a campaign to kill anti-Taliban militia leaders and have even published the names of some *arbakai* leaders in the hopes that disparate Afghan insurgent cells would execute said civilian commanders.<sup>431</sup> The Quetta Shura call to target Marjah's *arbakai* became a fatwa.<sup>432</sup> Such words and actions are likely evidence that the Taliban believe Marjah's grassroots movement as threatening to their intentions to control Afghanistan and reveal the potential potency of the movement in Marjah.

In summary, ending *fitna* was not simply rhetoric but defined the actions and effects of *arbakai* operations. Although the interviewee's statements were wrapped in hyperbole, the militia lived out their promises at a local level. Members fought for security each day with dedication and resolve. *Arbakai* did not rely on outside support but fulfilled their vision daily with the tools, weapons, and will they already held. That ISAF and GIRoA forces continue to help with security allows the *arbakai* to operate and track and kill Taliban with greater efficiency and effect. Unlike the

Taliban, ISAF and GIRoA allow the town to seek its own vision for security. ISAF and GIRoA goals and efforts are consonant with those of the *arbakai* to push out Taliban and Taliban influence from the village.

As is the case with autonomous and resilient movements in general,<sup>433</sup> the fighters did not just seek and achieve an end to fighting in their village. They also sought something more.<sup>434</sup> They operated with a view to improve their own destiny. Specifically, they wanted to improve the lives of their children and saw education as a way to not only allow their children and grandchildren to improve their livelihoods but also as a means for the next generations to be able to intellectually challenge the Taliban if violent extremists attempted a resurgence. The fighters were well aware of their intellectual limitations—unable to read the Quran or any literature that would have allowed them to at least vocally contest the notions of religion that the Taliban espoused. Thus education the second element of local's definition of enduring relative stability.

#### **4.4 Arbakai Fight for a Stable Future**

The majority of militiamen looked beyond the end of *fitna* and a new era of security to a goal of intellectual progress. Access to schools was the second locally accepted definition of stability for Marjah. In the mind of Marjah citizens and guardians, education would not only allow children a future of choice and self-determination but also an opportunity in which locals would be better able to ideologically stand up to outside belief systems. In the minds of locals, education would undermine the Taliban's ability to convince families to give up those youngest sons for free room, board, schooling, and perhaps inevitable extremist indoctrination attempts in Balochistan.<sup>435</sup> Fighters did not seem to fight for the sake of fighting. The calls of the “rhythm of the AK-47” and warrior *machismo*<sup>436</sup> had a clear future goal: education of the fighters' children. Although wrapped in messianic language, the fighters divulged during the interviews practical goals to protect and allow others to build and improve schools for their children. Education appeared a means for future and sustainable independence and self-determination at the individual and village level.

A common theme of the interview responses was an intention to end an era of alleged *jahiliyya*.<sup>437</sup> The term refers to a period of ignorance before the age of Islam. Some medieval and modern scholars and political authors have used the word *jahiliyya* to describe periods in Islamic history when Muslim-majority societies purportedly suffered from a lack of understanding of true religious values. These were supposedly times of un-enlightenment. Such claims—describing modern eras of ignorance—are highly subjective and debatable. Nonetheless, authors have used the idea to illustrate years of lack of knowledge and education according to the authors’ particular opinions.<sup>438</sup> And likewise, any claim in Marjah that Taliban brought a period of *jahiliyya* is subjective. This study will not make any claim as to any true understanding of enlightenment but will only describe the opinions and perceptions of those in Marjah.

Over 65 per cent of those militia members interviewed described the Taliban as instigating and maintaining an era of ignorance—akin to *jahiliyya*—with most fearful that a return of the Taliban would mean further illiteracy, misunderstandings of Islam, and closed schools. According to respondents, the Taliban—when in power—were a hindrance to the wants, needs, goals, and notion of stability according to Marjah fighters. It should be noted that never was there a query about education, but instead they volunteered their thoughts on schools:

*The Taliban does not allow us to build schools and clinics. They do not allow us to go to school, better ourselves, and receive education and enlightenment. They get in the way of what we want. We want schools, and they not only look down on this but they had gone out of their way to stop us from being educated. They do not even allow the young people to be educated. – (1)*

*[The Taliban] do not let people go to school. They would today not let children go to school and be happy. – (51)*

*The Taliban do not allow children to go to school. – (78)*

*Under Taliban governance, there was no school. – (84)*

Even those without children decried Taliban’s denial of education to the village of Marjah. For example:

*They came into our land and broke into our homes and burned down schools. They essentially broke our town. They came here and brought death. They came here and broke the tings in our town. They did not allow education. They did not allow teaching or learning. They did not allow basic school operations. [The Marjah arbakai] offered me the support I needed—the support I sought—to do what I wanted to do. They were a vehicle for my own ambitions—for my personal goals. The government offers the weapons and ammunition. They offer the practical materials that I need to fight off the Taliban. They offer the tools for me to do what I need to do. The Taliban brought fighting. And they failed, also, to bring any constructive policies. They did not nor could they build up anything or create any type of societal self-sufficiency. They only break and destroy things. And this is very easy for them—to destroy. And that is what they are—breakers and destroyers only. I will fight all the time—for my entire life. I am dedicated for all the years that I live on this earth. I do not have children. – (101)*

Yet worse than a simple absence of education, in the minds of Marjahns, Pakistan schools would influence some parents to allow their children to be educated in Pakistan. Free room, board, and food were promised along with a supposedly respectable religious education. Little did some parents know, initially, that some of these schools may attempt to recruit and mobilize these young people into Taliban ranks.<sup>439</sup> There are even schools in Pakistan that reportedly attempt to turn young boys into suicide bombers—schools in which physical hardship such as occasional beating and lack of water were mixed with promises of a pleasant afterlife in the hopes that the children would be more willing to die for the Taliban cause. Children are most often not taught to even understand the Quran at such institutions but are schooled on the premise that Islam is under brutal attack by Western oppressors.<sup>440</sup> Marjah militiamen and civilians wanted schools not only to provide young people with opportunities but also to undercut Taliban's ability to try to recruit children.

As local interviewees decried an education-less period under Taliban rule, they longed for a time when education would be a societal priority. No interviewee—each an adult—discussed wanting to go back to school to better himself. Instead, those with whom I spoke wished for their children and the children of neighbours to be able to go to school. The logic, to them, was that they were striving to defeat the Taliban so that there would be ample security for their children to be educated in order to rein in

a period of relative enlightenment. Education, to those interviewed, was a means to empower children to better be able to seek their own vocational aspirations.

Schools were simultaneously a method to provide the intellectual acumen to check future attempts at Taliban ideological influence. Not only did they want their children to lead better lives with an ability to develop society, but respondents also wished for their children to be able to fend off Taliban rhetoric. The feeling was that one of the reasons the Taliban was able to come to Marjah and rule so brutally was local inability to rhetorically counter Taliban claims to a superior understanding of religion. According to locals, education would be one sustainable defence against future attempted Taliban influence.<sup>441</sup>

In summary, to the fighters, offering stability enough for schools would secure a future of improved livelihoods, further ability of the young to follow their own goals, and inoculation against Taliban sway. The following is a small sample of responses from 60 per cent of interviewees who gave specific future aspirations regarding education:

*My son goes to school now. But he will fight the Taliban and help against the Taliban in the future. Today we are teaching the students to be educated and they will learn. And they will learn about the true nature of the Taliban. I became an [arbakai] block elder and leader to help my country. Why should I stay at home? I appreciate that the militias were and are helping. I am happy to help and enjoy helping. I enjoy killing the Taliban and fighting the Taliban. My father is a malik and was a block elder. So I have followed in my father's footsteps. In Marjah, the Taliban caused fighting in the street. So now I have 30 men. Marjah needs [arbakai]. – (54)*

*[The Taliban] are our enemy. The Taliban are the enemy of Marjah, the enemy of Afghanistan, the enemy of our children, and the enemy of our way of life. That is crystal clear. They are our enemy so I fight them. So I need to fight them. It is my duty to fight and kill Taliban to allow Afghanistan to become safe and secure. We all believe what I believe. The rest of the town, the rest of Marjah, is the same as me. Actually this is clear. The children want security. They all want peace. I am illiterate. And I don't want my children to be like me. They want education. They want a good future. They do not want fighting. So they are against the Taliban and will always oppose the Taliban. They hate and fear the Taliban. And as long as the Taliban will be again children fighting and growing and becoming educated*

*and literate, they will support any movement against the Taliban. Until there is a good future. I will fight everyday for as many years as necessary to ensure that we have a good future—safe and secure and free of even the slightest presence of Taliban. – (112)*

*My children feel that education is very important. They want education. This is very important for them. They want to go to school and earn degrees to work. They have clear visions for this. They understand what they want from this day forward. And the Taliban would never allow this. The Taliban would never allow education or my kids to go to school, and my children very much understand this clearly. – (99)*

*My children want the schools. They want education. And they will grow up to help this country. And the Taliban would and could never allow helpful positive education. The Taliban would and could never allow our children to grow up in an education system—to be educated. And this is very clear to even the youngest children. – (107)*

*My child is in school. Actually he's in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. When the Taliban came before, he couldn't go to school. The children want peace. They want security. They want to go to school. They want education. Things the Taliban forbade. – (70)*

*My son goes to school, and the Taliban would never allow this. He understands this. – (5)*

*I am uneducated. And I want my son to be able to do to school. – (51)*

*[My children] like education. They want and seek education. They want a better future, which the Taliban almost by definition would stop. – (83)*

*...the children need education. – (19)*

*My children want education. – (65)*

*[Our children] want good education and a bright future. – (75)*

*My children like education. They want to go to school. – (113)*

Such narratives often refer to restoring education not only to the children of Marjah but also to stopping Taliban's ability to curb education throughout Afghanistan. This message stream can be described as absolute, resolute, and cosmic—a 400-man uneducated militia movement bringing enlightenment to arguably one of the more impoverished, illiterate, and uneducated nations in Asia. In the same stroke, though, this story has underpinnings of a very realistic story for the village: the militias



provide security. This security allows contractors to build schools, teachers to walk without fear to classrooms, and students to walk to school and learn without fear of Taliban retribution. In addition, local schools provide an opportunity for children unable to work in local shops and local farms to avoid the necessity of free education just over the border in Pakistan—where locals believe children are brainwashed into violent extremist ideology.<sup>442</sup> This idea of a need for education gives a down-to-earth approach wrapped in a hyperbolized story—practical steps to provide schools in a village wrapped in exaggerated language to end an epoch intellectual darkness.

Such sentiment echoed that of the entire village.<sup>443</sup> People continue to want more schools and more money for teachers through 2013—with a special interest in seeing that teachers are able to earn a living wage. Such popular rhetoric was not without resolve. When there have not been enough schools for the local demand, townspeople have gladly turned homes during the day into working classrooms. Students and parents alike did not rely solely on the government of Afghanistan and its Ministry of Education but instead relied on themselves to meet the great demand for education.<sup>444</sup>

There was also local belief that educational centres would be a centrepiece to any local reintegration or counter-radicalization campaign. Local ISAF units, along with district government officials, and district community council members who comprised the *arbakai* commanders asked for GIRoA and ISAF reintegration funding in the form of schools.<sup>445</sup> Whether schools without coherent and tested curricula could successfully and sustainably help demobilize or de-radicalize former violent extremists is debatable. The effort to justify school money with a goal to counter radicalization was double pronged. First, community council and ISAF members argued that many future reintegrees, who had left the Taliban and wished to integrate back into culture, would likely be young school-aged fighters or young insurgency supporters or have young children.<sup>446</sup> They felt that the 90-day GIRoA-led District Reintegration Advisory Team's curriculum of religious, basic skills, and conflict resolution training would be insufficient to prevent former Taliban from re-joining an insurrection that funds its fighters. Reintegrees, especially former child and young adult fighters would need more substantive education options to allow anyone a path to skills, accreditation, and economic opportunity lest former fighters re-join the Taliban. They argued that any educational program that is open to all residents to

include former Taliban would be a platform for former fighters to assimilate as they gain the trust of other students—and gain a sense of community and brotherhood facing common academic challenges. Furthermore, former fighters would graduate with recognized certificates so as to avoid residents’ perception that the former insurgents received special treatment.<sup>447</sup>

Second, local ISAF officers and community council members felt that schools could offer young people a “window into a life that does not involve laying IEDs for cash or supporting an irreligious and immoral insurgency.”<sup>448</sup> They argued primary education would boost the ability of citizens to offer positive change in and for the community writ large. Local officials and ISAF representatives maintained that local schools could lessen the Taliban’s recruitment of young people into the free madrassas in Balochistan—the understanding being that this is where Taliban radicalize some children.<sup>449</sup> Whether or not schools could play a role to assimilate former Taliban fighters and supporters into Marjah proper, locals’ campaign to justify reintegration funding from the Afghan Reintegration Program for schools underlines Marjah citizens’ belief in the power of education.

In conclusion, Marjah *arbakai* and citizens believe in education as a road to future self-determination in the face of Taliban onslaught. They believe schools can give their children a future of choice and defence against Taliban rhetoric and classrooms can help turn former extremists into constructive and peaceful citizens. This theme materializes everyday as guardians patrol their blocks and hunt down Taliban fighters to allow their own children and all young people of the town to attend schools. Although the rhetoric is hyperbole—to bring in an era of stability and enlightenment for all of Afghanistan—militiamen’s goals are achievable and practical within Marjah to bring security and education.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The hypothesis of stability as a goal proved applicable for Marjah’s *arbakai*. Fighters interviewed felt insurgents brought chaos and revealed, in words and operations, an aspiration to restore a secure environment. Furthermore, the majority of respondents also defined stability as access to education that would in turn strengthen societal

capacity enough for the young to follow their own aims with an eye to undermining future Taliban influence. Although the interviewees spoke with an hyperbolic style, the guardians acted on these goals with practical resolve through helping to improve the security of the village. Underlying such verbal sentiments and combative actions was a sense of self-reliance. The locals expressed a desire for security and education and were then willing to act on their own to this end. Even the goal of security and education appeared a means of empowerment against those that had previously caused insecurity and denied access to schools.

Although stability proved to act as a motivation and goal—along with seemingly hyperbolic words and a sense of self-reliance—this theme does not preclude other drivers and aims of the village’s anti-violent-extremist fighters. The following chapter will explore the hypothesis that fighters, in addition to seeking stability and education, also oppose Taliban for ideological reasons potentially strengthening the drive for militiamen to fight and die in the name of ending Taliban presence and influence.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Hypothesis: Opposition to Foreign Ideology Motivates Arbakai**

While the goal of peace and stability with the purpose of education was a major professed motivation for the rise of Marjah's arbakai, this finding in no way obviates the possibility that other phenomena may have influenced arbakai's rise and determination to kill Taliban and end their threat to Marjah. It is conceivable that multiple rationales may impel a militiaman to continue to show up to work with full knowledge that such an action makes him an obvious target to violent extremists.<sup>450</sup>

This chapter will first describe why opposition to ideology is a valid hypothesis. Specifically it will unveil schisms between contemporary violent extremists and mainstream Muslims over ideology and the meaning of "jihad," the potential for an ideological and cultural fault line between Marjahns and ideological Taliban, and public outcries over radical implementations of ideology. This chapter looks to literature and some reports of splits between civilians and Taliban over both Taliban's beliefs and their willingness to kill in the name of such extremist principles.

The chapter will then describe how such divisions played out in Marjah, where the Taliban cells were uniquely ideologically devoted and exceptionally brutal towards civilians. To this violent extremist cruelty from a foreign belief system, most militiamen painted the Taliban as religiously, nationally, and morally alien and inferior. Such notions motivated the village's civilian forces and appeared to embolden their resolve.

#### **5.1 Worldwide Opposition to Violent Extremist Ideology**

Marjah, comprising Sufi-leading and tribally based citizens, has the potential to showcase divisions between civilians and extremists worldwide. Recent research underlines two broad groups who oppose modern violent extremism: conservative religious leaders and former violent radical groups. Both groups focus on disagreements over the idea of physical "jihad"—a sanctioned religious struggle or war.<sup>451</sup> There is anecdotal evidence in the form of military and journalist reporting of this debate spilling over into warfare: populations who have not agreed with violent

extremists' interpretations of "jihad" have risen up kinetically against the supposed extremist transgressors.<sup>452</sup>

The theme that violent extremists' actions are without religious justification is a prominent stream in literature on terrorism and radicalization. Theological exegeses reveal no consensus on the meaning of jihad<sup>453</sup>—the word that Taliban use to describe its own actions. Jihad appears to have a different meaning—some slight—for each author, scholar, and violent extremist. In fact there appears to never have been a consensus on jihad in the history of Islam.<sup>454</sup> While some liberal-leaning academics like Halim Rane claim an absolute conclusion that jihad is defensive and inherently peaceful,<sup>455</sup> many al-Qa`ida leaders come to an absolute conclusion that jihad is inherently offensive, violent, and limitless.<sup>456</sup>

Conservative religious leaders have been particularly vocal in their opposition to and condemnation of violent extremist ideology. As examples of different interpretations of jihad, Saudi Grand Mufti Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdullah and the Imam of the Grand Mosque of Mecca have denounced suicide bombings of innocents<sup>457</sup> while ninth-century scholar Muhammad al-Tabari interpreted the many verses on warfare in the Quran to mean that killing innocents is at certain times permissible.<sup>458</sup> Many constructionist Muslim theorists today believe that violent "jihad" is permissible and even necessary given the right circumstances to protect the lives and livelihoods of innocents. For example scholar Rudolph Peters, finds textual justifications for killing innocents.<sup>459</sup> In contrast, some violent extremist promoters such as deceased Anwar al-Awlaki, deceased Sayyid Qutb, and deceased Muhammad Abd-al-Salam Faraj believe that violent jihad is obligatory at all times under any circumstance.<sup>460</sup> Similarly Taliban's original leadership believed it obligatory to kill civilians in its efforts to take over Afghanistan and implement its own version of religious law.<sup>461</sup>

Top among the rich scholarship of conservative religious opposition to violence are studies by Jarret M. Brachman and Peter Mandaville. Salafism—a name that commonly describes conservative Muslims who elect to follow the teachings of the Prophet literally without centuries of scholarly interpretations—being inherently a potential effective criticism to violent extremism is key amongst Jarret M. Brachman's analyses. His *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* provides alternative

salafi doctrines to those used within violent extremist ranks—religious conservatism without violence. Brachman loosely (and admittedly derisively) categorizes eight salafist schools of thought to include “establishment,” “scientific,” and political Muslims—all of which fall short of condoning Taliban-type violence.<sup>462</sup>

Also highlighting the different schools of salafist thought, Peter Mandaville’s *Global Political Islam* concludes that the new “jihadist” schools of thought among salafists interpret too liberally from the original salafist thinkers. Nineteenth century religious reformers Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida referred to their movement as salafiyya but were politically and socially “progressive.” Each openly discussed modern political norms.<sup>463</sup> Their intent, according to Mandaville, was simply to give Muslims enough confidence in their religion to go back to the original sources themselves. Abu Ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb (commonly understood as ideological forefathers to many modern violent-extremist strands) took Rida’s literalist views to inspire their own works to justify violence in the name of religion. They distorted salafiyya, according to Mandaville. Pure salafism, according to Mandaville, does not include an acceptance of violence or adherence to any human leader.<sup>464</sup>

In addition to conservative opposition to violent extremist understandings of religious war are former violent extremists who now rescind their previous beliefs. Along with other researchers in the de-radicalization or disengagement field, Omar Ashour holds that when someone walks away from violence that person in one way or another realizes shortcomings of the terrorist organization’s leadership and ideology. Ashour’s *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* explains that factors that can lead to effective de-radicalization include dialogue with outside religious experts and seemingly spurious changing opinions of violent extremist leaders. From these internal and external conversations come resolutions to amend earlier violent views—meaning that the original violent religious understanding was inherently wrong. In short, these former extremists find their former extremist leaders as leaders and ideology erred.<sup>465</sup>

Looking to a specific case study of former violent extremist disappointment Gilles Kepel and Mary Habeck analyze one of al-Qa`ida founding officers Abu Musab al-

Suri's (born Mustafa Sitt Mariam Nassar) disappointment with al-Qa`ida leadership's direction up to and following 9/11.<sup>466</sup> Kepel and Habeck separately analyze al-Suri's massive texts—to include chronicles of his experiences in Afghanistan in the 1980s and Algeria in the 1990s and a 2004 1,600-page online book entitled *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*—presenting al-Suri as a dissenting voice against spectacular media-ready suicide attacks after supposed failures in Egypt, Bosnia, Algeria, Kashmir, and Chechnya.<sup>467</sup>

In 2007, another forefather of al-Qa`ida published a full book on why violent extremism is now irreligious and tactically unsound. And among the first journalists to analyze this godfather of contemporary violent extremism was al-Qa`ida and Taliban researcher and reporter Lawrence Wright. He discusses recanted terrorist leader, former Egyptian Islamic Jihad theologian, and al-Qa`ida forefather Sayyid Imam (a.k.a. Dr. Fadl). Sayyid Imam's new limits for jihad include practical, theological, and humanitarian parameters.<sup>468</sup> Practical arguments include, but are not limited to, the requirement for a safe refuge, ample financial resources, identifiable enemy, and equal contests (do not enter war with a much stronger enemy). Theological and humanitarian requirements include looking after family members foremost; the blessing of a respected *shaykh* or prayer leader to enter jihad or deem someone an unbeliever; forbiddance from ever killing civilians, foreigner guests in a Muslim country, Muslims abiding by different belief systems, and people because of their nationality; and illegality of terrorism. These notions were later echoed in Sayyid Imam's three books in 2007, 2009, and 2010 and interviews with press.<sup>469</sup>

Along with Islamic Jihad, Egypt's Gama'a Islamiyya is also famous for its published recantations a decade earlier. Among the analysts who assessed the volumes of books on Gama'a Islamiyya's renunciation is Rudolph Peters and Diaa Rashwan. According to these experts, Gama'a Islamiyya's (a violent offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood like Sayyid Imam's Islamic Jihad) Gama'a Islamiyya laid down the following parameters for jihad:<sup>470</sup> the entire Muslim community must take priority over individual organizations, human life is always of paramount importance, fighting jihad must be lawful and achievable, Muslims must respect laws protecting non-Muslim foreigners and other protected persons, Muslims should denounce *takfir* of a regime because an institution should not be put into the category of unbelief, and the

Quran forbids collective punishment. The organization's greatest surrender to the Egyptian regime was the consideration of jihad as only a general mobilization of a community—consensus represented with leaders—and not an individual or non-representative organizational act.<sup>471</sup> In short, Gama'a Islamiyya could not legally declare jihad again and publicly—whether through manipulation, an honest change in views, or a mix of both.

## **5.2 Potential for Clash of Beliefs in Marjah**

These condemnations of violent extremist theory underline the possibility of opposition to ideology as a driving force behind Marjah guardians. However, the case of Marjah has the potential to reveal a deeper ideological and cultural divide with violent extremists. The original Taliban leaders and their original followers recognize no other practice of religion but its own, which holds no place for the mysticism practices, shrines, celebrated mujahidin warriors, and egalitarian clans based off leadership and not spiritualism.<sup>472</sup> The two ways of life are incompatible. The Taliban could never accept southern Afghanistan's Pashtun reverence for monuments, non-religious traditional clan and village governance systems, listening to music on the radio, or any practice that was not part of Taliban's interpretation of how people should live.<sup>473</sup> Thus the potential for Marjahns to view the Taliban as an alien ideology that conducted brutal and nonsensical (in the eyes of Marjahns) violence and to be victim to especially gruesome violence was high.<sup>474</sup>

The Quetta Shura Taliban's faith and ideology are unique to any major strand of Islam. In their actions they are akin to regional al-Qa`ida affiliates such as al-Qa`ida in Iraq—willing to target Muslim civilians to include women, children, elderly, and handicapped. In their public messages, they sound like they are proudly one front on a greater worldwide fight to defend Islam. However, in their faith, they are like no other major political sect, school of faith, or school of law. The Taliban recognizes no other type of Islam but its own religion as valid.<sup>475</sup> The Taliban do not even recognize other political or fundamentalist streams of Islam. South Asia's version of Muslim Brotherhood "Jamaat-i-Islami"—even though it shares anti-tribalism stances like the Taliban—would find no audience with the Taliban. Shaikh Syed Abul A'ala Mawdudi's version of Muslim Brothers (founded in 1941, 13 years after Egypt's



original Muslim Brotherhood franchise) was heavily influenced by the works and views of Egypt's Brethren founder Hasan al-Banna. Al-Banna's views led to a growing Egyptian Brotherhood that, when repressed, grew extremist violent branches to include the Egyptian Islamic Jihad whose members later comprised most of al-Qa`ida's top leadership save a few such as Saudi-born Usama bin Ladin. Despite similar activities—to include suicide bombings and other spectacular media-ready terrorism plots—the Taliban reportedly do not see themselves as an ideological branch of bin Ladinism. Nor does the Taliban feel kinship with the political Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami. The Taliban are the Taliban and not a branch of any other ideology even if leaders and members sometimes find cause to side with other violent extremist movement.<sup>476</sup>

The Taliban do not even feel kinship with the spartan Saudi faith, known to Westerners as Wahabbism after the founder of that region's thought process over faith and literalist interpretations of the Quran. Though the Taliban and students of quasi-Deobandism have some sort of respect for Wahabbism and thus enjoyed overt donations from the Kingdom before 11 September 2001, they do not recognize Saudi Arabia's reportedly strict interpretations of religion let alone the relatively liberal mysticism of Marjah. Despite locals in Marjah disparaging comments that the Taliban are nothing but Wahabbis, the Taliban are not Wahabbis. They are the Taliban only and uniquely. They hold their own special understanding of the Quran, Hadith, religious laws, and history.<sup>477</sup>

Taliban were even critical of al-Qa`ida. Original Taliban leader Mullah Omar stated in July 2001 that—despite Usama bin Ladin's numerous fatwas—bin Ladin was not credentialed to divvy out any religious edicts. Bin Ladin had neither the scholarly grounding nor the minimum 12 years of Quranic training to qualify to be a mufti, according to Omar's professed standards.<sup>478</sup> Mullah Omar tried to curb bin Ladin's activities in the 1990s—placing al-Qa`ida's leader under house arrest, taking away his cell phone, telling him to cease speaking with the media, and forbidding him from issuing fatwas.<sup>479</sup>

On the other hand Mullah Omar saw himself as the only true religious leader of the only righteous religious movement. In 1996 declared himself *Amir al-Mu'minin* or

commander of the faithful—a term many believe to be saved just for the original caliphs. Such a vain and irreligious claim, according to author Richard Bonney, was intended to grant Omar some form of absolute political and religious power. He even held the Pashtun’s “robe of Muhammad” for 30 minutes in an attempt to give himself divine authority.<sup>480</sup> In short, the Taliban saw themselves, and only themselves, as leaders and warriors of a true religion that did not allow others.

One way to describe Taliban ideology is as a bent interpretation of the original Deobandi movement. The Deobandis—from the relatively “moderate” Hanafi school of law—originally rose up in India as a peaceful and constructive movement with a view to unite and reform themselves under the British rule.<sup>481</sup> Deobandis aimed to revive what they deemed to be progressive religious values and train new generations. In 1967 there were over 9,000 Deobandi schools throughout south Asia. By 1971 there were 900 madrassas in Pakistan alone, and by 1988 there were around 8,000 such schools in Pakistan. Along with these 8,000 schools were an additional 25,000 informal or unregistered Deobandi schools—most of which comprised religious “leaders” with little or no formal education or understanding of the original Deobandi ideology. These teachers, who flourished in rural areas and Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, taught what they believed were literalist views of the Quran, even though few instructors actually studied the Quran critically in their lives.<sup>482</sup> When the Taliban came into existence in southern Afghanistan in 1994, it was to this mutated quasi-Deobandi ideology that founders and followers adhered (the year this entity became a serious contender in an ongoing civil war between militias that lasted from the fall of the communist government until 1998, when the Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan but continued to fight the Northern Alliance).<sup>483</sup>

Those Pakistani schools did more than just supply ideology to the Taliban. They supply the Taliban with fighters, insurgents, and supporting personnel. They are a direct pipeline to the Taliban. By 1999, at least eight of the top Taliban leadership were graduates of the extremist Deobandi school in the Northwest Frontier Province Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqani. It is no coincidence that leaders would come from such a school—as this center is the Yale of Deobandi extremism excellence with 400 places for typically over 15,000 applications. One call to the university in 1997 by Mullah Omar himself led the key administrator to close down courses with an order for all

students to run across the border to directly link up with the Taliban in Afghanistan. A year later headmasters of 12 radical Deobandi madrassas in the Northwest Frontier Province shut down to send around 8,000 students to join Taliban ranks along with Jamiat-ul-Uloomi Islamiyyah—the Harvard of Deobandi extremism—in a Karachi suburb giving up 600 precious students. These schools do not just graduate future Taliban, they actively support and man Taliban even when in session.<sup>484</sup>

This mutated Pakistani Deobandi ideology is antithetical to the Sufi-leaning Hanafi thought, mysticism, or tribalism in much of Pashtun southern Afghanistan.<sup>485</sup> If representatives of this core Taliban belief system were to have led the insurgents' incursion into Marjah, there is great potential for a sharp clash of identities that could be cultural, spiritual, moral, and even national in nature. Moreover core ideological Taliban had the potential to be especially cruel in their actions towards those the insurgents saw as wayward detractors of a single faith. The possibility of brutality—as a materialization of ideological differences—may also, itself, be a motivation for Marjah's *arbakai* as the next section will describe.

### **5.3 Contempt Over Violent Extremist Actions**

Some literature offers evidence that violent extremists wantonly executing non-combatants may inspire popular backlash. This schism over murdered innocents points up the possibility that Marjah's *arbakai* may have also mobilized over seemingly unjust actions derived from a foreign ideology.

While some researchers and journalists believe that anti-Taliban Pakistani *lashkars* form out of self-defence, Mukhtar A. Khan asserts—without survey results or targeted interviews with *lashkar* leaders—that these militias organize and mobilize out of a moral drive to rid the surrounding areas of militants who kidnap, kill children, and seem to murder indiscriminately.<sup>486</sup> Khan's "The Role of Tribal *Lashkars* in Winning Pakistan's War on Terror"<sup>487</sup> outlines the formation of several anti-Taliban *lashkars* in Pakistan. According to Khan, the militias grew naturally, independently, and indigenously as a result of *jirgas*' decisions to check or destroy militant power. Each *lashkar* tribesman travels with his own food, supplies, ammunition, and weapon—with no logistical or financial help or incentive from the government.<sup>488</sup>

Khan's conclusions are not, however, based on any survey and cannot be verified as representative of the motives of lashkars, or other militia types such as arbakai, leaders and members.

Similar to tribal movements in Pakistan, Iraq saw at least one major counter-extremist indigenous movement in 2006 and 2007. Analysts Bill Roggio and Rega Jabar conclude that in addition to ambitions for increased power, the Anbar Awakening in Iraq was also sparked by disgust over innocents killed.<sup>489</sup> Interviews and written reports from commanders, advisors, staff, and intelligence officers who were physically present during the uprising verified Roggio and Jabar's claim. For example, al-Qa`ida killed tribal leaders who may have posed any type of threat, and al-Qa`ida openly announced its intent to kill anyone to include women and children who appeared to roadblock its vision of an Islamic state in which Muslims are only subjugated to a caliph.<sup>490</sup> In September 2006, disparate tribal elements of the uprising reportedly unified and announced their intentions to media. Shaykh Abdul Sattar al-Rishawi and his tribal allies began to form the Anbar Awakening, which was later renamed the Iraqi Awakening, in reaction to the widespread violence of al-Qa`ida in Iraq. Sattar worked within the Iraqi and U.S. security sphere and U.S. troops to build into Emergency Response Units of 750 tribal volunteers each. The summer of 2006 saw an average of 25 attacks per day in the al-Anbar province compared to four per day in 2007. Markets opened, and Hit, Haditha, and Husayba became permissible areas for civilians to roam.<sup>491</sup> By summer 2007, Anbar's al-Qa`ida in Iraq was mostly either defeated or not active.<sup>492</sup> It is likely that proximity to violence and the popular revulsion to this violence allowed the tribes to rise up against Anbar's al-Qa`ida in Iraq.

A similar theme to that of Anbar seems to have also run through anti-Taliban movements in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Unlike this case study of Marjah, however, there was no corroborating critical study of these movements and no attempt at a rigorous interview scheme to verify the account of local press and U.S. military reports and observations. Nonetheless, there are sufficient third-party observations to suggest with some confidence that these other Southwest Asia movements at least began at the heels of violent extremist ideology and the inter-personal violence that such ideology seemed to have sparked against local civilians.

In each of the following cases there is a denunciation of violent extremist actions. The criticism does not appear to derive as some intellectual exercise against an alien ideology. It also does not appear to be enough to simply distrust or dislike the violent extremists. Instead, evidence suggests that persistent wanton violent extremist attacks initially propel reactive uprisings. Proximity to gratuitous extremist attacks initially sparks some indigenous counter-violent extremist movements. The following are examples.

Andar, 2012: The Andar District of Ghazni Province reportedly suffered from severe Taliban suppression for three years before there was a sufficient security bubble, that Coalition Forces and the Afghan National Security Forces provided, to allow locals to rise up.<sup>493</sup> Harsh treatment included Taliban closing and then banning schools for young men<sup>494</sup> and executing some tribal elders, helping to trigger this seemingly spontaneous call to arms.<sup>495</sup> Other examples of oppression included closing of some bazaars;<sup>496</sup> harsh implementation of religious laws by Ghanzi-located Taliban leaders;<sup>497</sup> forbidding a local Mullahs to hold appropriate religious burials for those the Taliban accused of having worked for GIRoA in any way in addition to the accused families and extended families; blocking humanitarian aid; burning humanitarian aid that slipped through Taliban blockades; ceasing road construction; killing cell phone service from sundown to sunup; and locking down access to the central areas of the village to include the district center.<sup>498</sup> Andar's criticisms of Taliban were not theoretic but instead informed by day-to-day violence and oppression, which personally affected civilians and those that would comprise the uprising's militia.

Underlining a repulsion of the Taliban and their repression may also have been a perception that Pakistani Taliban elements and other foreign fighters were increasingly taking over in the district.<sup>499</sup> And these outsiders were forcing harsher laws<sup>500</sup> than were customary.<sup>501</sup> Such a popular notion is not surprising especially as rumors that the Taliban in Pakistan had incarcerated influential Ghazni resident Mullah Ismail, who had previously been a respected local commander. There are also reports that the uprising may have begun with local Taliban elements that no longer stood with Pakistani leadership—an uprising that began as internal divisions between

Taliban elements.<sup>502</sup> Unwanted outside influence<sup>503</sup> may have been a driver behind the Andar awakening in addition to a perception of wanton destruction and violence.<sup>504</sup> Today locals claim the anti-Taliban resistance targets “...terrorists who have closed schools and destroyed clinics, roads, and other public facilities” and “...foreigners from Punjab...”<sup>505</sup>

Bad Pakh, 2012: In July 2012, an Afghan online news service claimed that locals in Laghman Province’s Bad Pakh area killed five members of a supposed Taliban cell when that cell was apparently planning attacks.<sup>506</sup> Local villages joined this movement defeating Taliban elements in the area by August 2012.<sup>507</sup> According to an American news service, Laghman’s uprising began largely at the heels of the Taliban shutting down educational institutions for children. “They wanted to make our children illiterate and miserable,” stated a Laghman district elder Malik Ghulam Rusal.<sup>508</sup> In addition to fears of illiterate youth, Laghman civilians were also upset over heavy-handed suppression from the Taliban.<sup>509</sup> Examples were threats to the families of young men that joined Afghan Security Forces.<sup>510</sup> Apparently fearful of innocent Afghan civilian victims of insurgency, the same district elder exclaimed, “We told them that if you want to wage jihad, go and fight the foreigners, not ordinary people.”

Yet another driver appears to be that the Taliban in their area were Pakistani led.<sup>511</sup> According to press reports, hatred against Taliban was specifically focused, at times, on their alien “extreme” spiritual convictions and harsh enforcement of non-locally appropriate rules.<sup>512</sup>

Dir, Pakistan, 2009: Visceral humanitarian disgust over mass killing may have been a major driver of those in the district of Dir in northern Pakistan. Taliban militants reportedly began building up there since 2005. The commander of these 200-400 violent extremists was, according to the Pakistani government, linked to al-Qa`ida.<sup>513</sup>

Only four of 25 villages offered shelter to the militants while village elders tried for months in 2009 to persuade—peacefully—the Taliban to abandon the region. But then in June 2009, in an apparent attempt to intimidate and mollify the population, an insurgent suicide bomber detonated at a mosque prayer killing at least 30

noncombatants. This attack, instead of pacifying the population, ignited locals to build an over 1,000-strong militia to hunt down and kill Taliban and rid the area of militants and their influence. The end result was the Taliban cornered and then encircled in a valley and three Taliban commanders dead.<sup>514</sup>

During this time, reportedly some felt the Taliban irreligious and an enemy of the faith. Said an area man providing medical aid to wounded militia members, “[t]his bomb blast proved the last straw. This made the people violent...We are not quitting the area until we destroy them. We know this is not Islam. These are criminals.”<sup>515</sup>

Matta, Pakistan, 2009: Leadership messaging focused on perceived humanitarian crimes at the hand of the Taliban. Lashkar leaders to include operational commander Brigadier General Jamal Abdul Nasir and tribal elders stated to recruits that they had lived under oppression for three years.<sup>516</sup> Their stories focused on violent extremists’ atrocities to include children being killed in front of their parents and training of child suicide bombers. The environment was described as “barbaric.”<sup>517</sup> Much of this messaging could be rhetorical, but leaders deemed their criticisms important to recruiting new fighters.

Taking a more holistic view to these examples of uprisings against Taliban violence—or violent reactions of victims or persistent wanton interpersonal violence—are a number of scholars who have studied entire populations’ disgust and perhaps even mobilization at the heels of violent extremist actions. One of these works is Gilles Kepel’s *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* focusing on Egypt and Algeria in the 1990s. According to Kepel, the populations simply had enough and stopped supporting terrorist groups allowing the governments to conduct wide and harsh crackdowns.<sup>518</sup> This appears to be a popular notion in contemporary literature but offers no evidence that civilians would take up arms against violent extremists because of militants’ violence.<sup>519</sup>

Those that study disengagement and de-radicalization also underline criticisms of violent extremists’ wanton murder of innocents. With case studies, disengagement specialists Michael Jacobson and Audrey Kurth Cronin reveal that killing innocents is another reason people walk away from terrorism. Michael Jacobson’s “Terrorist

Drop-outs: One Way of Promoting a Counter-Narrative” provides two examples of terrorists who left organizations because of innocents killed—egregiously hypocritical since violent extremists claim to protect innocent Muslims. Usama bin Ladin’s fourth son, after five years in an Afghan training camp left al-Qa`ida after 9/11 believing that al-Qa`ida’s tactics verged on insanity because of the killing of so many innocents. Likewise, former Indonesian Jama`a Islamiyya leader Nasir Abas apparently left primarily because so many innocents were targeted.<sup>520</sup> There is, however, no independent verification of Abas’ primary motivation.

Along with Jacobson, Cronin maintains that innocent deaths have been one of the causes for terrorists to stop. Her article “How terrorist campaigns end” provides data on terrorist movements that have ended. In her analysis, she states that the Red Brigades, Second of June Movement, Weather Underground, Red Army Faction, The Order, and the Aryan Resistance Army all stopped due to a lack of generational transition. She also finds that the Real Irish Republican Army, ETA, and 17 November Revolutionary Organization all ceased due to a loss of public support. In all cases, killing of innocents may have played a key role.<sup>521</sup> In Cronin’s *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, she concludes that one primary fissure inside al-Qa`ida is over killing too many innocents.<sup>522</sup>

Buttressing the distress over innocent Muslim deaths as a possible anti-extremist motivation is a number of recent polls. Christian Leuprecht, Todd Hataley, Sophia Moskalenko, and Clark McCauley’s “Winning the Battle but Losing the War? Narrative and Counter-Narratives Strategy” provides polling data that most Muslims are against the killing of innocents, even if the same persons believe that Muslims are under attack from the West. In the aftermath of 9/11, two-thirds of those polled in Muslim-majority countries felt that killing civilians was forbidden in Islam. Majorities in the survey felt that bombings and assassinations are “not justified at all.”<sup>523</sup> From this data, the authors hypothesize that one way to keep people from supporting terrorisms should underline that attacks on Western or Muslim civilians are not legitimate acts of war.<sup>524</sup>



With this vast literature of divisions between populations and violent extremist over beliefs and actions, it can be hypothesized that such sentiments could conceivably help to mobilize anti-extremist civilian movements. However, doubts over violent extremist ideology and violence does not necessarily translate into motivation for civilians to act in all circumstances. Therefore, this study will now test the hypothesis of opposition to beliefs as a driving force in the case of Marjah militiamen's fight against Taliban.

#### **5.4 Opposition to Foreign Ideology Motivates Arbakai**

Both opposition to innocent deaths and opposition to Taliban's belief system were common motivators for fighting Taliban. Within Marjah, Taliban's religious beliefs, governance, and actions were without compromise. There could be no more ideal of a location to test the hypothesis that opposition to ideology and violent actions drive grassroots movements than Marjah—the location of locals who followed a spiritualism that was the antithesis of Taliban's ideology. The full force of the interpersonal violence may have come from Taliban's top ideological ranks. Marjah became so important to Taliban central that in February 2011, according to media reports, a recording circulated around Taliban-strong-hold Quetta, Pakistan calling for a "jihad" against those taking up arms against extremists in Marjah.<sup>525</sup> Not only was it a poppy centre for a province that provides 70-80 per cent of the world's opium,<sup>526</sup> but it was also a moral defeat for the Taliban that once squarely held the town.

In Marjah, locals faced some of the most brutal destabilization from the Taliban. Some foreign government officials claimed that half were from Pakistani madrassas with a regional view. Other reports claimed that some fighters believed they were fighting for al-Qa`ida in order to eventually take over the world. Some reports even claimed that there were many foreign fighters from beyond Pakistan to include Arabs.<sup>527</sup>

Also unique to Afghanistan, Marjah's residents also faced arguably the Taliban's most violent and ideological lieutenant in history. Mullah Dadullah Akhund led Taliban's southern offensive with a brutal reputation and with an inclination to personally behead people. "The Butcher," as locals and the Taliban called him,

loudly supported al-Qa`ida and appointed himself as the leader of Taliban's supposed "al-Qa`ida wing." He openly called himself the "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi" of Afghanistan in reference to the deceased violent leader of al-Qa`ida in Iraq.<sup>528</sup> Mullah Dadullah's ideological fervor won him the support and respect of those Taliban recruits from the quasi-Deobandi schools ensuring his ranks were overflowing with ideological Taliban who would fight ruthlessly and gladly give up their lives.<sup>529</sup> Although British Special Forces killed Mullah Dadullah Akhun in 2007, the Taliban's brutal tactics in Helmand continued with similar ferocity—not seen anywhere else in Afghanistan to include the Taliban's homeland of Kandahar. The Taliban stole from fields and compounds and tortured and killed any local that dared oppose the Taliban or dared work with Westerners or the Afghan government.<sup>530</sup>

Arbakai hatred of Taliban beliefs is not derived just from some theoretical danger of Taliban ideology but also from very real intimidation. Close proximity to violent extremists showed arbakai members and leaders and the populace supporting the militia what they were fighting for. They were victims with blood still fresh in the sand. And this victimization helped to propel a deep-seated hatred of the Taliban, who the Marjah militia saw as an alien force with an alien ideology and an antithetical moral compass.

Proximity to violence may have helped to maintain and deepen the resolve Marjah's indigenous arbakai. The Taliban fought and killed people in their houses and near their compounds. Taliban would show up unannounced and take food, money, and property. Taliban would lob off the head of the first person who refused to pay taxes as an example to others.<sup>531</sup> Taliban turned farms to poppy growing machines and markets to wide-open morphine/opium/heroin emporiums.<sup>532</sup> Suicide bombers<sup>533</sup> and IED layers have targeted civilians just as they targeted Afghan security forces and Americans.<sup>534</sup> Anyone who winced at the Taliban's laws and authority were gruesomely punished in public. The locals felt threatened and felt the materialization of this threat—not some theoretical propaganda but brutal daily oppression.<sup>535</sup>

With increased improvised explosive devices<sup>536</sup> and suicide attacks that killed soldiers, government workers, and civilians indiscriminately, the Taliban were seen as corrupt robbers, criminals, and exploiters.<sup>537</sup> Most Helmandis to include Marjahns

saw the Taliban as an unwanted foreign presence backed by Pakistani intelligence. Radios informed Helmand residents of the Taliban's nine suicide attacks in 2005, almost 100 in 2006, 142 in 2007, and 148 in 2008. Locals became aware of the nationwide road explosives that mostly killed civilians—from 739 in 2006 to 3,200 in 2008.<sup>538</sup> Of all the population centres in rural Afghanistan, Marjah arguably became the site of one of the most brutal Taliban efforts to kill and repress all vestiges of tribal law, leadership, and governance. Many of Helmand's most repressing and vicious violent extremists massed into Marjah.

Such actions and stories underlined the sensibility that the Taliban were ideologically corrupt—both unspecific and unconditional. Additionally, militiamen made specific claims of Taliban violent aggression and brutality. Some of those with whom I spoke appeared even befuddled about Taliban violence. One survey respondent laughed at Taliban's idiosyncratic rules to include their punishment of “slapping” when a resident's beard was not within proper Taliban-length regulations. He exclaimed, “If my beard is not big enough then they would come by and slap me. Just about my beard length. They would come about something so small. Such a tiny matter. And slap me in public.” However, most interviewees felt far more deep-seated anger at Taliban corruption and brutality:

*The Taliban are an atrocity. They kill innocents. The Taliban are dangerous. They are a big problem. The Taliban want to occupy this land. They would bring terrorists like before. They would be a shelter for terrorists. The Taliban are cruel. All the people know this. All communities, all Afghans, and those in Marjah and Helmand know this. Unless we can make Taliban like human beings, we will not allow them to come here. We will fight or educate. But either way we will eradicate all the Taliban—clear them from this land...For example, a couple days ago the Taliban shot two people—killing one and leaving the other injured. We must remove the Taliban. – (12)*

*Now I am one of the unit commanders for the arbakai. The Taliban murdered my father. They murdered my brother. The Taliban did this during Ramadan—a time for holiness and introspection and family. This is the lowest of the low. This is very bad. They killed my family right in the mosque. Shame. Shame on them. I join for the sake of the district. I looked for a better way to fight the Taliban. And the [arbakai is] a better way. They are like me and give me the support I need to fight the Taliban. I do not like fighting. I do not like war. But this is necessary because I want freedom. I seek freedom. My children*

*think like me now. My brother and father were killed. And they know this. They will want to enter the [arbakai]. They want a better life. – (105)*

*The Taliban are not educated. They have no understanding of anything intellectual nor have they attended any accredited schools or universities. The Taliban is the enemy of all of Afghanistan. The entire land. I am the enemy of all Taliban. I am the enemy of each of them. The Taliban put a roadside bomb in my community mosque and also in my compound. The Taliban have also worn clothes of a soldier to trick us and not let us know his true identity. The Taliban soldier tricks us to kill innocents. To kill us when we have not done anything. – (1)*

These sample testimonies were far from rare. The following shorter interview excerpts serve to underline the disgust locals had for the Taliban—growing out of personal experience vice hypothetical or philosophical opposition to violent extremism:

*I oppose the Taliban because the Taliban are cruel with people. They kill some civilians, and that is why I have a conflict with them. The Taliban do not allow schools and offer no services in Afghanistan. They are against all people. They put IEDs in the roads. This is why we fight and kill them...The Taliban are crazy. – (17)*

*When [the Taliban] came I only saw fighting in the village. I only saw civilians getting killed. The Taliban put mines in the road. They exploded people and killed them. They injured civilians. The Taliban came into my home. – (80)*

*The Taliban are cruel. They kill everyone that works for the government...The Taliban killed my family. They killed them with undue cruelty. The Taliban are so cruel and don't even know the people that they kill. – (81)*

*The Taliban came into my homes. Men came right besides my home and brought fighting. They kill our children. They burned down our children's schools. They did not bring any good policies. – (76)*

*When I want something like a school or a bridge, they destroy it. – (38)*

*The Taliban came right into our very houses and took what they wanted. They invaded our homes. They invaded our town and brought nothing but fighting and destruction. – (108)*

*The Taliban killed my uncle and cousin. – (58)*

*[The Taliban] killed my son with 200 bullets into his body. – (7)*

*The Taliban killed my brother. My brother was young. He was innocent. – (71)*

*They beat me and shot me twice in the leg (the interviewee showed me two healed bullet wounds on his left calf). They came into my compound and destroyed it. The Taliban do not want security. – (50)*

*The Taliban shot me with a PKR round. When the Taliban came before, they lived in my block. They cut the heads of my friends...They came into my home. – (80)*

*Their bad actions include cutting off the heads of civilians.” – (84)*

Morally, spiritually, and nationally, the arbakai painted their enemy as distinctly different. Although the question of the Taliban's nationality was never posed, of 113 respondents, 51 elected to provide their opinions of the Taliban's national identity. All 51 painted the Taliban as foreigners with foreign belief systems. Many referred to more than one nationality, noting that more than one non-Afghan entity influenced Taliban ideology and actions. Of those that volunteered their opinions of the Taliban, the following was the breakdown of interview participants regarding nationality:

- 98 per cent referred to Taliban as Pakistani or with heavy Pakistani influence or education—jibing with other reports on population perspectives.<sup>539</sup> The view of Pakistan was especially negative. Villagers seemingly unanimously felt that Pakistan harbours terrorists, are behind Afghan instability, and are the enemy of the Afghan government and Afghan citizens. There is a deep distrust of Pakistanis, the Pakistani government, Pakistani intelligence, and the Pakistani military. Villagers felt that Pakistan is behind the local Taliban elements that previously brutalized the village of Marjah and continue to attempt to make Marjah a less secure place. Calling someone a Pakistani or mentioning that Pakistan has influenced someone is considered deeply insulting.<sup>540</sup>
- 29 per cent Iran
- 14 per cent Saudi Arabia
- 4 per cent Arab nations in general

Those who elected to speak about the perceived nationality of Taliban saw varied foreign influences. Nonetheless, the overriding perception was that Taliban were Pakistani or at least derived from Pakistani ideology or influence. Often Afghan citizens felt that these outsiders had designs on their independence and would bring unwanted policies, ideologies, and instability.<sup>541</sup> The following are a small sample of arbakai verbal narratives on the foreign nature of Taliban:

*Most of the Taliban are foreign from Pakistan. They do not want security in the village. They come into our compounds in Afghanistan. When I want something like a school or a bridge, they destroy it. Pakistan does not want security in Afghanistan. Pakistan wants Afghanistan backwards...IEDs are made in Iran and Pakistan. They put them under the bridges....Most of Taliban are from Pakistan and Iran. Now they are pussies and can't do anything....I will fight the Taliban for ten years...I will defeat them in ten years..I ask why. Why the Pakistanis, ISI, and CIA comes after us. The United States killed Usama bin Ladin, but the United States does not want to fight Pakistan....I don't know exactly what the religion is. There are the wahabi salafi influences from Pakistan, and the Akhunda (likely referring to Bahai'I faith of a low-ranking clergyman, normally a derogatory term) influence from Iran. – (38)*

*The Taliban get their support from Pakistan. We do not want Pakistan influence or Pakistan in here. Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to improve. They do not want to allow enlightenment, education, or any type of development. They do not want anything positive for us. So the Taliban are our enemy. And we will fight this enemy. – (87)*

*We must clear out the enemy because the Taliban are not from Afghanistan. They are from Pakistan. In the past, Ahmad Shah Masood fought against the Taliban and the tribes. Now the Taliban belongs to Arab countries and Pakistan. We are uneducated, and the Taliban made us drug dealers. So we wanted to form a militia. The Taliban do not want security. We must push them back to Pakistan. We need security in all of Afghanistan and Helmand. I will fight the Taliban until they are completely finished. If you ask my son, he will say that the Taliban are our enemy. The big enemy. People were uneducated. There are three types of Taliban. First are the Sunnis in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Then there are the wahabbi. Then there are the Mahdi-an from being trained in Pakistan. – (43)*

*The Taliban kills people. They mess with all the people and create problems in the community. They come from Pakistan. Pakistan policy is not good in Afghanistan. Every time the Pakistanis fight and create problems in Afghanistan. They are not good for this country. The Taliban are supported by Pakistan. Pakistan sends in the IEDs and ammunition. The Taliban are uneducated. Pakistan trains Afghans and has used them to put IEDs in the road. The religious schools in Pakistan train kids to commit suicide. The all have come from Pakistan. All of Marjah hates the Taliban. The Taliban does not belong. They say we are spying for the government. All of Marjah does not want them. They are not good. The decapitate people. They are cruel. They are especially against all Afghan peoples. The majority of Taliban came in on motorcycles so now all the people are scared of motorcycles. They are cruel, decapitate people, and tax locals. All of Marjah residents hate the Taliban. We will fight until*

*the Taliban are removed. The Taliban come from Pakistan and Iran. (Yelling) WE SHOULD ERADICATE THE TALIBAN. Their source is in Iran and Pakistan. – (22)*

*Everyone of them came from Pakistan to Afghanistan to fight with the government. They come from Pakistan....If the Taliban join us, then no problem. If they do not join us that we fight them....Our children do not want fighting. They do not want killing. They do not want conflict. They want peace. The Taliban say “we are Muslims.” But their action is not the action of Muslims. They came from Iran and Pakistan to only fight. They say they are Muslims. But they are only Muslims in appearance. – (21)*

*The Taliban are Muslim. But I don’t know what’s what about religion. The Taliban’s religion is the Quran. They say they believe in the Quran. But they are taught in Pakistan and are from Pakistan. – (50)*

*I will always oppose the Taliban because they come from Pakistan. - (5)*

There appears a deeply ingrained historical distrust over Pakistan and Pakistani influences among Pashtuns in southern Afghanistan to include those in Marjah.<sup>542</sup> With a history ripe with opposition to outside empires, it is of little surprise that Afghans felt distrust towards the country of Pakistan when the British created it in 1947. Negative perceptions of Afghanistan’s new neighbour metastasized after the Soviets withdrew.<sup>543</sup> Pakistan armed certain militias and eventually supported the Taliban takeover and then Taliban government in the 1990s.<sup>544</sup> The history of meddling in Afghan affairs likely adds to the antipathy Marjans have towards a seemingly Pakistani enemy.

In addition to a divide over nationality, there also appeared a schism over religion specifically. Most, but not all, arbakai interviewed felt that Taliban held to a separate religion. Out of the 113 interviewed, only two did not respond to the question of whether Taliban were Muslim. Out of the 111 responses, just over 17 per cent perceived the Taliban as “non-wayward Muslims.”

- 42.3 per cent answered that Taliban were not Muslims at all—7 per cent of these respondents said that the Taliban were not human beings
- 25 per cent the Taliban came from another sect of Islam—different than what is practiced in Afghanistan.
- 15.4 per cent the Taliban comprise wayward perverted Muslims

- 17.3 per cent the Taliban are Muslims, without equivocation

The following highlights the notions that arbakai despised the spiritual nature of its Taliban enemies:

*The Taliban are not Muslims. They are terrorists. The Taliban defame Islam. They are against Islam. Islam is a good religion. Islam knows good. Islam wants peace—as most people in Marjah want peace and are good Muslims. – (8)*

*The reason is that Islam does not allow Muslims to kill innocents. And the Taliban kills Muslims and everyone. Everyone is innocent. Everyone is neutral. No matter your religion. And Islam does not allow killing—especially killing of innocents. – (9)*

*There is a large distrust of the Taliban. There are some Taliban left but not many here. Last week Taliban wanted to plant a mine. When they were working on it they killed themselves. So there is some Taliban left....I will fight as long as necessary to keep the safety of my family...Our children do not like the Taliban because I am militia. I also teach them that the Taliban is the enemy. They fear the Taliban because the Taliban has killed students. The Taliban says that they are Muslims. I think that mostly they are not from our religion. They came to our village and ate our food. The people were not happy. The Taliban is incorrect and not from our religion. They consider the people of Afghanistan enemies. – (30)*

*Muslims do good deed. They want people to be better. Islam improves life. We are good Muslims here. But the Taliban do bad deeds and so they are bad Muslims. They are educated from the other side of the Pakistani border—in Pakistan. The neighbour countries are similar to the Taliban. They are all the enemy of Afghanistan. Our neighbours provide various forms of support for the Taliban. Specifically it is Iran and Pakistan. They all do not want us to improve. They are all against us. They all want fighting. They are our enemy—Iran, Pakistan, and the Taliban. – (77)*

*The Taliban say they are Muslims, but Muslims don't act the way the Taliban do. They don't know Islam. They don't understand Islam. The Taliban are crazy. – (17)*

*They do not pray, and they do not know about God. They are Wahabbi. I don't know much about this. Their beliefs are from Pakistan and Iran. – (39)*

*Their religion is Islam, but they do not act like Muslims. – (42)*



*Most of the Taliban say that their religion is Muhammadin. But they are not Muhammadin. They kill locals. In Islam, in the Quran, it says not to kill and fight. – (45)*

*The Taliban use the Quran. And I use the Quran. I do. I pray five times a day. The Taliban pray five times a day. But they also belong to Pakistan. They get support from Pakistan. They are a Pakistani sect. – (102)*

These ideas that the Taliban derive from a foreign belief system or at least mutate the religion which locals follow serve to exacerbate any divide between locals and the Taliban. Just as with the void over nationality, the religious differences underline an adversarial feeling that outsiders are not guests but instead invaders with a view to subjugate locals.<sup>545</sup> The division is not an intellectual one but a source of fear over the identity of an alien people that have plans to rule and change the local way of life.

From a moral perspective, 55 per cent of those with whom I spoke amongst the Marjah arbakai members responded voluntarily, without any prompting, that the Taliban egregiously kills innocent defenceless civilians jibing with other reporting of local popular perspectives.<sup>546</sup> Quotations in the previous chapter on Taliban bringing instability referred to the deadly and destructive nature of violent extremists and can be summed up from one respondent (39), who mentioned, as if in passing, he “saw one Talib behead 20 people.” Again, these were not intellectual notions but instead often emotional outpourings of disgust over unjust actions. Some interviewees spoke about Taliban’s murdering as symptom of a foreign nationality or religion, and others provided statements focused mostly on Taliban actions. Either way, Marjah guardians felt that the Taliban were morally inferior to the citizens of their village.

In summary, locals felt a moral, spiritual, and national distance to the Taliban no matter how much an outside analyst might argue with the absolute truth of such notions. There is some evidence that, though there are many foreign fighters among Helmand’s Taliban, Afghans comprise much of the Taliban.<sup>547</sup> Furthermore, some researchers maintain that many violent extremist recruits do not share the same spiritualism or ideology as Taliban.<sup>548</sup> Finally, one could make the argument that Marjah’s militia can also act quite violently towards the Taliban<sup>549</sup> making local notions of perceived moral superiority seem subjective. Nonetheless, the interviewees

in this study, which looks to the perspectives and motivations of an anti-extremist group, hold a consistent belief over an ethical, religious, and national schism, giving rise to an “us versus them” mindset. Such divisiveness appears to be a manifestation of the earlier hypothesis in this chapter that cultural differences between Pakistan-based ideological Taliban and Marjahns could cause strife.

### **5.5 Religious Differences Exacerbate Tensions**

As hypothesized, the Taliban were likely particularly brutal towards locals due to an incompatibility of spiritual beliefs. Illiterate mystical Marjahns became the victims of a brutally ideological Taliban. Locals have believed that Taliban ideological insurgents have intended to silence the voices and beliefs of local religion.<sup>550</sup> Marjah’s religion and the Taliban’s understanding of faith are incompatible. The Taliban viewed those in Marjah as barbaric detractors of the true faith and may thus have repressed the locals with a visceral disgust.<sup>551</sup> Taliban seek to get rid of any presence they see as foreign—even if ironically many of the Taliban are foreigners or at least follow foreign ideology in the eyes of locals—and then create a state according to their own violent extremist laws. The Taliban have no patience and no room for any rural governance systems. In fact, the very idea that a community could have elders that are not religious leaders is a threat to the very identity of Taliban.<sup>552</sup>

Such a faith holds zero room for tolerance, debate, or anything that might appear on the surface to be against the oneness of God. Idols, mysticism, gravesites, shrines, elevated mujahidin warrior charismatics, tribal elders, and tribal land owners hold no place in the Taliban’s envisioned new world order of adherence to Taliban’s view above all else.<sup>553</sup> In the eyes of the Taliban, Marjah and surrounding areas along the Helmand River are “victim” of millennia of tribalism, feudalism, sufism, mysticism, and idolatry. Marjahns pray to the moon to ward away evil spirits, travel to broken shrines for good luck, are unable to read Pashtun let alone classical Arabic, and are historically devoid of learned mullahs. Furthermore Marjah’s Hanafi Sufism and ignorance has no Catholic-like religious structure to articulate singular or consistent views to answer to Taliban ideology.<sup>554</sup>

The centrality of shrines to Marjah citizens' faith most pointedly illustrates locals' spirituality in practice, and such a practice is a complete abomination to Taliban. 47 kilometers directly south of Marjah, along the Helmand River Valley, lies the Safaar shrine—to which Marjah citizens travel to pray and ask for health and prosperity specifically. The village elder there provided to a research team his oral history of the shrine—with some differences from historical accounts. According to the elder Haji Sharapedin, locals built the shrine approximately 600 years ago as a grave site for Sheikh Hasan, someone who claimed to be in the line of descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Sharapedin claimed to know the names, but not accomplishments, of some of Sheikh Hasan's ancestors. His account of the earliest known predecessor was Sheikh Abdul Qadir Gilani who Sharapedin claimed had a shrine in Baghdad. The line of succession then moved to the Indian subcontinent, leaving two more shrines as the family moved northward in what is today southern Helmand province. When locals built a shrine around the gravesite in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the locals charged a person as “keeper of the shrine” to resurface and keep up the shrine annually—underlining the importance of this site to southern Helmandi culture. The shrine architects are buried in a smaller shrine 100 meters south of the Safar shrine further magnifying what the Taliban must have thought was a repulsive practice. In the mid 1970s the shrine was so aged and cracked that locals all decided to demolish the original building to build a new one. The Soviets reportedly observed locals using this shrine for spiritual reasons and, thinking it was a mujahidin spiritual site, reportedly destroyed it. When the Soviets left, locals expressed keen interest in rebuilding the shrine yet again.<sup>555</sup> This shrine alone highlights the high level of importance a physical shrine has to southern Helmandis—a practice detestable to violent extremists who regularly level shrines as a priority order of business.<sup>556</sup>

Yet another example of a manifestation of Marjah's sufi beliefs lies 19 kilometers south of town along the Helmand River. There lies the Amir Agha Shrine built in 671 AD according to local oral tradition—a location to which Marjahns travel to pray. The shrine is dedicated to Amir Biland Swaheb who was the son of legendary and almost mythical half paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>557</sup>

In the spring of 2011, Marjah elders joined other Helmandi tribal and government leaders on the “Voices of Religious Tolerance” (VORT) trip to Jordan sponsored by

the U.S. Marine Corps Regimental Combat Team-1 of Task Force Leatherneck, U.S. Department of State embassies of Kabul and Amman, Jordanian Armed Forces of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and nonprofit East-West Center for Human Resources Development in Jordan.<sup>558</sup> Those Marjah block elders traveling to Jordan explained that their most important experiences were visiting shrines to include the gravesites of the Prophet Muhammad's Companions killed during the Battle of Muta', the gravesites of seven Byzantine princes, and the final resting place of one of Muhammad's companions Abu Ubaidah.<sup>559</sup> Such praise towards tombs—no matter how important to Islamic history—is unholy according to the Taliban.<sup>560</sup>

It is conceivable that the Taliban, who regularly are known to destroy shrines and convert mystics at gunpoint, considered Marjahns backwards and ignorant of religion. And such a notion could easily have led the Taliban to particular cruelty and hatred of the locals. At the very least, the Marjah's rampant illiteracy allowed the Taliban to feel intellectually superior to Marjahns and feel especially empowered to shell out punishments. 2007-2009 was an age of complete subjugation. Virtually every single respondent who spoke about the period between 2005 and 2009 during my interviews described a period of execution, persecution, and a slave-like state. Therefore, it is not surprising then that Marjahns—at the first possible instance—would want to raise an indigenous militia to help defeat and keep out the Taliban.

Beyond respect and prayers for shrines, the warrior nature of Marjahns appeared perhaps to even rival or prevail above their religious identity. During the interviews, for example, religious language took a back seat to warrior language. Only a few interview respondents voluntarily used any religious language such as "God," "the Prophet," "Islam," or "the Quran." Their views actually paralleled those of two military officers on the Jordanian trip some Marjah leaders attended and not the Jordanian religious leaders. These two Jordanian speakers may simply share similar views to like-minded troops who fight an enemy that uses similar tactics.<sup>561</sup> Or the speakers may have reinforced and strengthened Marjah arabakai's messianic and united views over extremism, after Marjah elders returned to discuss their trip.<sup>562</sup> Either way, the striking similarity points up a warrior nature that is antithetical to Taliban belief systems that put spirituality and the oneness of God above everything to include martial bravado.

Specifically, Colonel Dr. Majed Darawsheh of Jordan's Ifta' Ministry<sup>563</sup> spoke emphatically that killers, like al-Qa`ida or the Taliban, create disorder and damage all mankind.<sup>564</sup> He exclaimed that the most important goal is to achieve secure autonomously and by whatever means. Like Marjah arbakai, Colonel Darawsheh claimed that violent extremists brought wide fitna and that security is an admirable goal.<sup>565</sup> Jordanian Colonel Ared Al-Zabin, who had served in Afghanistan's restive Logar Province,<sup>566</sup> stated to the Marjah leaders on that trip that the Taliban warp religion for their own personal objectives. Then he emphasized Taliban's efforts to block education, and the strong desire and need for Afghan children to attend school. He was effectively echoing arbakai messages of Taliban's irreligiousness and the need for enlightenment as a goal (covered in a later chapter).<sup>567</sup> On the other hand, the other speakers, such as a revered university professor and Mufti, spoke of violent extremism damaging Islam writ large.<sup>568</sup> But none of these religious leaders and religious scholars' messages appeared to echo in the mouths of Marjah's guardians.<sup>569</sup> Instead, it appeared that the military officers offered the most penetrating speeches or at least speeches that happened to parallel those beliefs in Marjah. These consonant beliefs perhaps underline a warrior ethos in Marjah that may have made locals seem secular or even backwards in the eyes of the highly spiritual Taliban.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Marjahns' dedication to a non-Taliban approach to spiritualism—to include a warrior core and a respect for shrines—may very well have driven the Taliban to unusually brutal tactics against villagers. Local civilians and militiamen showed no intention to alter or amend their belief system, practices, and warrior nature. It is thus unsurprising that arbakai overwhelmingly created a distance between themselves and the Taliban. There appeared a genuine disdain for Taliban amongst village volunteer fighters and civilians alike. Locals celebrate at the capture and death of Taliban, no matter how brutal.<sup>570</sup>

This criticism of Taliban identity may have served more than a motivation to fight Taliban cells. This level of criticism may have also helped arbakai to target and kill Taliban fighters. This national, spiritual, and moral distance could help militiamen

continue its brutal attacks against their enemy. In the narrow streets of Marjah and even in the small surrounding desert settlements, there is little distance to the enemy. There is no opportunity for a Marjah guardian to kill Taliban militant 1,000 yards away with a sniper weapon. There is no opportunity for a militiaman to drop an aerial bomb from a mile in the sky. The killing is close. It is intimate. And it is against people that are also Pashtun. It is against people that also call themselves Muslims. It is against mostly Afghans, even if the arbakai consider them Pakistani or Pakistan influenced. The killing is mechanically, geographically, ethnically, and religiously close.

Although there is little physical distance, such as a bombardier has when dropping munitions on a population above cloud cover,<sup>571</sup> the cultural, moral, and social distances may allow arbakai and “emotional hooding” to kill with greater ease. Arbakai’s criticisms of violent extremists may help to dehumanize somewhat the Taliban and overcome somewhat resistance to killing.<sup>572</sup> Ultimately the victims—through desensitization—may become subhuman in the eyes of Marjah guardians.<sup>573</sup> Criticisms of Taliban may help propel arbakai to continue push out Taliban incursions and influence for a self-determined future.

Marjah arbakai’s repulsion of not only the Taliban members but also their perceived nationality, immorality, and antagonistic spiritualism is not necessarily a symptom of general insularity. The arbakai still work with ISAF and GIRoA officials—these officials allowing Marjah fighters and villages to define their own future free of any unwanted outside influence or incursion. Arbakai violence against the Taliban did not outwardly appear as retribution. Instead, militiamen spoke only of wanting peace and security and ending a period of fitna and ignorance. Ultimately the movement was foremost one of a positive push towards producing stability by themselves as opposed to a negative campaign just to erase Taliban. Nevertheless rejection of Taliban identity, faith, and actions may have played a role in arbakai guardians rising and deepening resolve. With the Taliban’s religious justification to oppose and ultimately end clan structures and tribalism, the following chapter will look to the possibility that tribal identity may have also been a driving factor behind ant-extremist movement actions.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Hypothesis: Marjah Arbakai Fight to Protect Tribalism**

The previous chapter argued that a cultural schism between the Taliban and Marjah citizens may have helped to cause or at the very least exacerbated the willingness of militiamen to rise and fight. Central to this division could be the essential nature of Marjah's identity, which appears from history to be the geographic clans dictated by the canal system. This chapter will investigate whether tribalism—either bloodline or geographically based as is common in southern Afghanistan—may have acted as a motivation or goal of the arbakai.

First, this chapter will discuss, as a hypothesis, violent extremists' threat to traditional local power in literature and recent history. Then it will analyse military doctrine that bases itself off the assumption that indeed tribalism is a motivation for anti-Taliban civilian movements—pointing up the cogency of clan-ism as a driving narrative of Marjah's arbakai. Finally, the chapter will test this hypothesis for Marjah: whether protection of local identity drove arbakai to fight local violent extremists. The data finds that tribalism—in the form of hereditary clan or geographic mini-community—was not an explicit motivation or aim. Instead, of those fighters that chose to speak about identity, nationalism was the prevailing sentiment. However, the terrestrial clans or qawm systems, resilient after 30 years of warfare and disruption, were the viable vehicle by which locals rose. Nationalism was a rallying cry and motivation--answering the question “why” many fight—but clans were the means answering the “how” locals rose and warred with Taliban.

#### **6.1 Violent Extremists Target Tribes and Tribalism**

Worldwide violent extremist counter-tribal policies point up the possibility that Marjah's militiamen may have seen protection of tribes as a main motivator. The media is ripe with reports of violent extremists executing tribal leaders in southern Somalia, Afghanistan, western Pakistan, Yemen, and the Sahel. Even though one of the Taliban's<sup>574</sup> and similar violent extremist tactics is to marry into tribes, speak in tribal language, and build strong rapport with clan leadership to initially integrate into

an area, they have historically eventually turned on local traditional tribal and territorial governance systems possibly viewing tribal law and leaders as a threat.

Once some violent extremists integrate into a local tribal system,<sup>575</sup> the tribes then offer layers of defence against governments and foreign counterterrorism efforts. Violent extremists then often turn on local clan leaders eventually if 1) those leaders are against violent extremists to begin with, 2) they pose a possible power struggle with violent extremists, 3) they work with an anti-violent-extremist government,<sup>576</sup> 4) or they do not disband in the long term and fail to abide by a violent extremist group's idea of religious law and structure.<sup>577</sup>

In Iraq, for example, the Anbar awakening was based on tribal defence in addition to the movement's visceral reaction to wanton al-Qa`ida-in-Iraq's violent.<sup>578</sup> Al-Qa`ida saw tribalism as antithetical to its vision of a caliphate and would attempt to kill each and every tribal elder who appeared to not fully support al-Qa`ida militant leaders and their vision.<sup>579</sup> Al-Qa`ida posed a threat to the very identity of tribalism in Iraq's western desert. Examples include violent extremists' attempts to curb tribal laws and economic means. Militants forbade or became obstacles to traditional inter-tribal trading, tribal interpretations of religion, and listening to music and women sitting in chairs allowable by tribes but forbidden by extremists.<sup>580</sup> Furthermore, local tribal leaders saw suicide bombings as an abomination to local tribe's morality and spirituality. Although al-Qa`ida comprised mostly nationals, many of the suicide bombers and the most violent offenders were reportedly foreigners creating a deep "us versus them" or "al-Qa`ida versus tribes."<sup>581</sup> In the case of the Anbar Awakening, Iraqi tribes saw violent extremists' assaults on the tribal identity as a blood feud. When an Iraqi tribe holds a blood feud against violent extremists or any organization, that blood feud may cut across religious or ideological lines. In the case of some of Anbar tribes, such a feud could reportedly last up to six generations or more. Tribal leaders explicitly communicated the endurance of this cultural phenomenon to Coalition Forces as these traditional clans effectively defeated violent extremists within their respective territories.<sup>582</sup>

Likewise, as discussed in the previous chapter, in reaction to outside threats, tribes in Pashtun areas of southwest Asia have traditionally bound together to push out foreign



invaders. Scott Atran poses that any outside occupation tends to unite Pashtun tribes into a formidable enemy to outsiders.<sup>583</sup> This clan—whether territory of bloodline based—unification in the face of outside threat could very well apply to perceived Taliban invaders in areas. However, Atran does not investigate whether tribalism as an identity and way of life could turn into a battle cry and reason for an anti-violent-extremist movement to act.

Like Atran, Antonio Giustozzi analyses Pashtun clans in an historical context as resilient and apt to defend their identity and way of life. Additionally, Giustozzi proposes that the phenomenon of tribal methods of living became critical strengths against outsiders. For example, outside armies have had to learn to fight each tribe differently because each clan—being independent of one another and running their people and land in their own way—will have disparate fighting styles.<sup>584</sup> Another example of tribal identity—and its potential to help protect against anti-tribal efforts—is each differently styled Pashtun clan traditionally holding an egalitarian system of leadership so that the people that can best serve tribal members hold power. So if an outsider killed an elder, that particular tribe could very well have another leader in quick time.<sup>585</sup> In short, according to this and other experts on Afghanistan, tribalism may not only be a rallying cry for anti-extremist movements but may also be a source of its potency and longevity.

Tribes defending their lives and their way of life appear to have been key drivers to some anti-extremist movements in Pashtun areas of Pakistan.<sup>586</sup> Farhat Taj conducted interviews with anti-Taliban lashkar leaders in western rural Pakistan. Her research involved interviewing tribal and village leaders<sup>587</sup> with no attempt to survey the fighters comprising the lashkars or maintain a baseline of consistent questioning to create a rigorous comparative study of anti-Taliban lashkars and their motivations. Her interviews find that lashkars come into existence for self-defense.<sup>588</sup> While wealthier Pakistani citizens near Taliban-held areas can hire private contracted security services, she argues, poorer tribes have no choice but to fight out of sheer self-defense with whatever weapons they can conjure. She maintains that the organization and mobilization of the lashkar is centuries-old traditional reaction primarily to outside threats.<sup>589</sup> She underlines that clans face daily real threats of kidnapping and murder from the Taliban with about 600 tribal elders, deputies, and

representatives executed in Waziristan alone since 2001.<sup>590</sup> Rural Pashtun clan systems, she maintains, is not only the vehicle for anti-extremist uprisings but is also a key inspiration for clans to act. Such contemporary anecdotal evidence suggests that clan could hypothetically rise up against violent extremists in defense of their identity. However, there has been no in-depth research conducted during a rural anti-extremist movement as it unfolds to refute or prove.

## **6.2 Military's Strategy Based on this Hypothesis**

The designers of a policy to recruit tribesmen to be auxiliary policemen to fight Taliban explicitly assumed this hypothesis to be true.<sup>591</sup> However, there is a stark difference between respecting and allowing clan militias to organize and operate as they naturally do on the one hand and directly choosing tribesmen for a western trained police unit on the other hand. Although the designers of this policy hypothesized that tribes could rebel out of protection of the clan system,<sup>592</sup> there were no studies to indicate that clans—territorial or blood-line—would actually use the identity as a rallying cry to begin a movement. Furthermore, the direct recruitment of police by foreign troops in rural areas, instead of allowing natural qawm uprisings that have historical precedent, would likely undermine the possibility of tribalism as a driver. The military doctrinal direct recruitment creates artificial indigenous units not necessarily representative or tied to an established social identity.

Taking a look, now, at prevailing counterinsurgency theories and doctrines, this particular ISAF approach resembles an anti-tribal posture or at least a stance that is not trustworthy of clan-ism. As the literature review in the first chapter revealed, policies that ignore or weaken tribes may do so for tribes acting as anti-liberal institutions, potential instability of tribal warfare, and possible weakening of central government power.<sup>593</sup> The United States and NATO policy seemed to at least account for this last argument as it gave an Afghan district chief of police ultimate responsibility for all that a Western-recruited Afghan Local Police (ALP) unit did or failed to do. Doctrinally, this counterinsurgency method appears to jibe with those authors who recommend a heavy outside approach that place militias in an ancillary role as opposed to a main effort in the fight against violent extremists. Especially with the uniformed Afghan police ultimately in charge after foreign troops have done

the recruitment, one could view these non-traditional militias as just part of a foreign troop-heavy strategy in which neighbourhood watches filled some sort of police-to-civilian ratio.<sup>594</sup>

The United States' attempt to recruit from tribes—though in the case of Afghanistan with an illogical expectation that fighters would rally around the identity from which they temporarily left, because Westerners recruited units that were not natural *arbakai* and did not necessarily represent particular tribes—has historical precedence. The current programs in Afghanistan appear somewhat to mirror efforts during the U.S. military campaigns in Vietnam.<sup>595</sup> U.S. Marine Combined Action Platoons—from 1965 through 1971—attempted, in part, to build and support “Population Forces” or “Self-Defense Corps,” who acted like local militias.<sup>596</sup> In Iraq, tribes in the al-Anbar province, supported in a hands-off approach by the U.S. Marine Corps and Army, began the “Anbar Awakening” and then “Sons of Iraq” movement to target al-Qa’ida in Iraq elements.<sup>597</sup> These are just two examples in a vast history of counterinsurgency that in part relies on leveraging local anti-insurgent informal forces. The case of Afghanistan is in some ways a modern materialization of counterinsurgency experience.

Today NATO and ISAF commanders have largely bought into this strategy of building paramilitary-type groups instead of allowing *qawm* to rise up naturally against Taliban.<sup>598</sup> The current Afghan National Army and Police are unable to reach deeply into rural Afghanistan—where three quarters of the population resides<sup>599</sup>—and are further unfamiliar with terrain, weather, seasons, cultures, linguistic variations, histories, and customs.<sup>600</sup> Therefore, as early as 2008, then ISAF Commander General Patraeus put emphasis on strengthening local forces and tribal liaison.<sup>601</sup> Former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates also exclaimed, “..the only solution in Afghanistan is to work with the tribes and provincial leaders in terms of trying to create a backlash against the Taliban.”<sup>602</sup> However, the idea of allowing *qawm* to use their traditional governance systems to raise *arbakai* and *lashkars* was not a consideration.

Conventional and Special Forces of NATO implemented ISAF and Washington, DC’s vision through local defence forces—money and firepower over an hypothesis. As

disparate efforts to raise local forces were already underway, U.S. Special Forces began the Village Stability Operations (with Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan building in Kabul its Village Stability National Coordination Center formally in 2009<sup>603</sup>), which typically produces local police<sup>604</sup> from its units at Village Stability Platforms while promoting governance, development, and security along traditional counterinsurgency stages: reconnoitre, shape, clear, hold, build, expand, and transition.<sup>605</sup> ISAF and NATO Special Forces specifically saw the ALP as a resilient, efficient, culturally appropriate, and locally accepted solution.<sup>606</sup> U.S. Special Forces sees the ALP as the most “visible and effective”<sup>607</sup> component of all the Afghan National Security Forces with a cost of only \$270 million USD per year—cheap when compared to the relatively massive expenditure in Afghanistan on roads, security contracts, and trucking businesses.<sup>608</sup>

Even GIRoA backed this Special Forces’ approach. Originally 10,000 ALP were intended from an Afghan Presidential decree in August 2010.<sup>609</sup> The authorized maximum slots allotted then skyrocketed to 30,000 then once again to 45,000. As of 28 January 2013, however, there were only 19,851 ALP cops so far in place.<sup>610</sup> Part of the reason for Afghan government backing may very well be because of GIRoA control mechanisms such as District Chiefs of Police responsible and answerable for ALP activities in their districts and placing the Ministry of the Interior in charge of the ALP program writ large, even as ISAF ran the ALP programs in the field.<sup>611</sup> It should be interjected that not all government officials agree with the policy of increased ALP. As with other elements of ANSF, civilian Afghan officials have complained about occasional mistreatment of civilians and criminal activity. For example, one government prosecutor in province of Kunduz exclaimed about the ALP, “[a]ll of them are a bunch of illiterate and uneducated bandits and thugs who go around harassing people.”<sup>612</sup> Nevertheless the executive federal government in Afghanistan has overall supported the increasing of ALP.<sup>613</sup>

The conventional U.S. Army and Marines also funded local militias dubbed Tribal Security Forces<sup>614</sup>, Afghan Local Police (same name as those of the Special Forces), Local Defense Initiative, Afghan Local Police, Community Defense Initiative, Afghanistan Public Protection Program, Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure, Interim Solutions for Critical Infrastructure (not to be confused with the latter),

Neighborhood Watch Program, and Afghan National Auxiliary Police.<sup>615</sup> None consider the idea to simply allow, encourage, or empower qawm uprisings against Taliban. All efforts programmatically ensure U.S. troops directly recruit and train tribesmen from rural areas.

Although every environment, situation, and ISAF unit is unique,<sup>616</sup> U.S. Marines and Army has accepted Village Stability Operations methodologies on training locals—some of which derives from U.S. Special Forces Field Manual 3-05.202 and U.S. Special Operations Command Village Stability Operations 101 with general guidance on performing operations in remote areas.<sup>617</sup> The doctrine is a materialization of the mindset that outside forces—even when employing local militias—are to take a heavy-handed approach with regards presence and control of militias. U.S. Special Forces teams will establish a Village Stability Platform in a village at the request of one or more village elders along with the appropriate district governor. From there, they “build” local defence forces.<sup>618</sup> Likewise, conventional forces normally attempt to identify and work with traditional local leadership while building neighbourhood watch efforts. Also both Special Forces and conventional forces appear to follow two general themes when trying to coax locals to revolt: one is to establish a general security bubble<sup>619</sup> so that locals feels safe enough to meet and train, and the other is to have a robust quick reaction force on call so that locals can feel confident while planning and training in case the militia feels suddenly overwhelmed by the enemy.<sup>620</sup> This process requires direct presence and activities of U.S. and NATO personnel:

- Special Forces were charged with physically living within villages along with attachments of other troops.<sup>621</sup> For example, U.S. Army and Marine Special Forces units team with civil affairs experts and a “Military Information Support Operations” intelligence cell,<sup>622</sup> civil affairs attachments, female engagement teams or cultural support teams (also comprising female NATO troops), and psychological operations operators. Sometimes these teams invited, into their platform, information operations coordinators, public affairs representatives, and partner agency representatives depending on the area, mission, and unit to conduct all operations to include partnership with unconventional militia police.
- Each platform is charged with directly ensuring that they address security, development, and governance.<sup>623</sup> Security, in this case, means that the NATO forces, themselves, ensure a security bubble for their personnel and the village writ large before and during the militia recruitments. Development, in this case, does not translate into long-term improvement of livelihoods of an

already stable area but instead means spending sometimes thousands of U.S. dollars for locals to build structures such as bridges and canals and to conduct activities such as agricultural training. And governance, under this doctrine, entails NATO forces and civilian partners meeting directly with both traditional elders and local water and agricultural experts. The program, in short, calls for interjections of thousands of dollars and continuous NATO presence and activities.

- Militias are supposed to comprise members evenly amongst bloodline tribal affiliations—often undermining natural inter and intra-tribal relationships and oftentimes ignoring completely qawm architecture in which the disposition is based off of territory and in which bloodline affiliation is of secondary importance to geography to the point of being trivial.<sup>624</sup>
- Platforms must employ themselves, their assets, or hired Afghans to conduct surveys out into the villages and surrounding areas to try to understand the human terrain as a continuous action—further exacerbating alien presence and activity in the area.<sup>625</sup>
- Leaders are supposed to ensure that tribal elders accept their plan of raising militias against Taliban and then in turn seek popular support. Essentially unit commanders are charged with influencing elders to take on an action that those elders were not otherwise undertaking.<sup>626</sup>
- The program eventually must connect the militia leaders to the district government and then back to the central government in Kabul, ultimately undermining the autonomy and visions of the local elders and rural governance systems. Kabul is very much an alien entity to much of rural Pashtun Afghanistan in the south and interjecting the capital's oversight and any level of control is unnatural to the local systems.<sup>627</sup>
- Commanders, staff, and non-commissioned-officers of NATO are charged with ensuring civilian-military relationships with regards to both NATO and Afghans to bring people services, security, and development. This translates into flying out U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Department of Agriculture officers and contractors to areas to work with the NATO teams and to encourage local governance entities—with no responsibility or legal authority to provide any services—and representatives from national ministries directly into rural areas even when the Afghan constitution charges traditional and informal leadership in rural areas to provide basic services and development.<sup>628</sup>

In 2010, RAND analysts fully supported this approach and specifically emphasized the presence of ISAF quick reaction units to make the informal police recruits feel safe from potential overwhelming Taliban attacks; traditional institutions to include shuras and jirgas to be involved initially to make local police appear legitimate to locals; a non-offensive and small militia to ensure they do not become so powerful as to challenge the central government or regional stability; and eventual transfer of

duties to the government.<sup>629</sup> Like the Village Stability Operations doctrine, think tank recommendations called for U.S. troops to directly recruit militiamen even if the foreign forces first paid respect to a particular elder or set of local leaders.

In 2010 Regimental Combat Team-1 Commanding Officer—who would later oversee Marjah's ALP programs—attended a joint Center for Strategic and International Studies and RAND meeting in which academics in no uncertain terms suggested that Local Defense Forces were the only way to reach a suggest 40:1 security force to civilian ratio.<sup>630</sup> And Marjah's counter-Taliban volunteers meet the description of this type of scheme using auxiliary/paramilitary troops to supplement official security numbers. In this vein, the thorough study of the motivations of Marjah's militias provide one case study of the myriad of local paramilitary elements of counterinsurgency.

While conventional and Special Forces doctrine revolved on the assumption that tribes and tribalism could aid in the stabilizing and securing rural populations, there is yet to be a holistic study on the strategy's efficacy during NATO involvement in Afghanistan. Furthermore, there exists only limited anecdotal evidence that such militias would use the identity of clan as a rallying cry and motivation to fight and die trying to stave off Taliban from their communities. The remainder of this chapter will test whether doctrinal assumptions of tribalism as a driver for anti-violent extremist movements applies to the case study of Marjah.

It must be noted, also, that formal doctrine ignores grassroots self-driven anti-extremist insurrections. There are no rules and regulation or even suggestions on how to interact with an *arbakai* like Marjah's that began as a natural uprising on a perceived alien force of violent extremists. And even the doctrine that exists hinges on an assumption that tribalism is one driver for locals to desire to fight violent extremist suppression of rural societal systems—an unproven hypothesis. This study will test this hypothesis in Marjah with a view to uncover the *arbakai*'s motivation amidst Taliban threats and international security forces' strategies.

### **6.3 Tribalism Does Not Appear to Motivate Arbakai**

Despite a literature and military doctrine suggesting the possibility that arbakai might claim to fight for clan and community, not one interview respondent claimed he fought for his qawm. No evidence in the Marjah case study supports the hypothesis that protection of tribalism or territorial clan-ism was a narrative for the anti-violent-extremist grassroots movement. Instead, the identity most identified during interviews—supported through other streams of reports on Marjah—was nationalism.

Although most in Marjah could not point out Afghanistan on a world map, they said they were fighting for Afghanistan and were Afghans foremost. Although most in Marjah appeared wedded only to their own particular block and block elder, they said they were fighting and dying for all of Afghanistan. While most in Marjah fight only in Marjah and at times in the nearby desert outskirts, they messianically and exaggeratedly wished to bring security and enlightenment to all of Afghanistan. Militiamen neither appeared to have aspirations to leave their village nor had the numbers, arms, vehicles, or fuel to rid the Taliban from all of Afghanistan, but many spoke in hyperbolized nationalistic terms. Their words were on a national scale while their actions were village-based.

Out of the 113 respondents, 112 offered thoughts on the identity for which they fought. Of the 112, most volunteered several identities for which they fought. Not one said he fought for his qawm or clan. Instead, most claimed they fought for the entire country, while many also spoke about the village and family as those they wished to protect.

- 75 per cent of respondents mentioned that they fought for Afghanistan
- 43 per cent Marjah
- 35 per cent families
- 14 per cent himself
- Five per cent Helmand province
- Three per cent Islam

Typically arbakai would speak primarily about fighting for all of Afghanistan while also stating they were fighting for other identities simultaneously. Such responses



often began with stories of personal or family victimization that quickly elevated to an impulse to fight on the behalf of all of Afghanistan, oftentimes with anti-Pakistan undertones:

*The Taliban are not good people. They are bad people. They came into my home. They used brute force, brute strength to take what they want and do what they want. They used their strength to do what they want. We had no ability, no strength at the time, to fight the Taliban. We could not fight against the Taliban. We have to come join the [arbakai]. They use their strength, so I need the strength to fight the Taliban. I am compelled to defend Afghanistan. They use bad works and do this wrongly in the name of Islam. They cannot have this government. And I do not what them to have governance over this area. They just cannot rule us. I will fight them all the time. For the rest of my time. I will fight until they leave completely. – (86)*

*I am against the Taliban because the Taliban do not like Afghanistan. I wanted peace so I decided to combat the Taliban. My life is now good. This is how I wanted it. Children can go to school, and there is security. The Taliban are against Afghanistan and Marjah culture, security, and education. I want to fight the Taliban for the rest of my life. I will not leave the militia or militia's mission. My son is just like me. He wants to remove the Taliban from all of Afghanistan. The Taliban's religion is not good. They do not think or care about people, women, and children. They are outside the religion. They want to destroy, use bombs, and hurt people only. – (55)*

*I became an [arbakai] block elder and leader to help my country. Why should I stay at home? I appreciate that the militias were and are helping. I am happy to help and enjoy helping. I enjoy killing the Taliban and fighting the Taliban. My father is a malik and was a block elder. So I have followed in my father's footsteps. In Marjah, the Taliban caused fighting in the street. So now I have 30 men. Marjah needs ISCI's. I will not leave the [arbakai]. We need agriculture and security in Marjah. We need security in Marjah and Afghanistan. We need to have security everywhere forever. – (54)*

*The Taliban only want to fight. I do not want this fighting. The Taliban only want suicide attacks. I am happy with our militia and want to give to our country and our government. I want there to be schools. I am happy with this security. I fought with the Russians as a mujahid. I helped to solve that problem. Before the Russians and even during the Russians people were educated. But after the Russians, people were uneducated as it was through the Taliban rule. The Marines are 100% good. We will all fight for security for a long time like we did against the Russians. I will fight for life. Even as a boy I wanted to fight. I want to fight and kill all the Taliban. I want to help Marjah and help Afghanistan. When my son is old he will be like those*

*in the militias. He likes the arbakai. He will be against the Taliban in the future. My religion is against the Taliban. Pakistan and Iran are the enemy. Baazgul, the [arbakai] commander helped to bring me to the militia and will make Marjah secure. – (53)*

*This is our homeland, our district, our country. The Taliban are the enemy of our country and my family. I now want to help my family and my country. I want to have a relationship with our people and with Afghanistan and keep my family safe. So I fight the Taliban and keep them secure. During the 13-year war with the Taliban took everything. There was no peace. There was no education. Before in Marjah there were many Taliban. Now we are stronger than the Taliban. The ANA and police and our national security forces are stronger than the Taliban. I will erase the Taliban from the country. The Taliban are the enemy of the country. – (13)*

*The Taliban are not good people. They are the enemy of Afghanistan. The Taliban take the side of some tribes like the Alikozai. The Taliban are not good for Afghanistan. I want to protect Marjah, my village, and serve Afghanistan. I am uneducated. And I want my son to be able to go to school. But the Taliban do not allow people to go to school. All the people know that the Taliban are not good people. They do not solve problems. Their courts are a problem. They want people to fight. The Taliban takes one side or the other. They are not a good arbitrator, they do not have good judgment, and they kill people indiscriminately. The Taliban say they are Muslims. But the Taliban are not. They don't allow Islamic law. The Taliban kills. But Muslims do not want to eradicate people and don't allow suicide. The Taliban joined with the Pakistani people to make those Pakistanis go to religious schools. – (51)*

The nationalist claims, by the majority of Marjah civilian guardian, effectively served several purposes. Claimed nationalism created a clear “us versus them” mentality against a Taliban enemy that centred on opposing a corrupt and impious government. Arbakai’s conscious choice to be the protectors of Afghanistan drove a wedge between the Taliban identity and those fighting Taliban incursion, presence, and influence. Effectively an outward display of hatred of everything Taliban, a vocal nationalist identity was antithetical to Taliban narratives, faith, and actions. Anti-extremist fighters claimed to be nationalists of a nation state that Taliban criticize commonly for corruption and un-spirituality least of all for Afghanistan’s—the government and her citizens—strong partnership with the United States and Western allies.<sup>631</sup>

Additionally, the idea of “we are fighting for Afghanistan” could theoretically serve to reinforce and strengthen counter-Taliban operations because the narrative provides the individual risking his life a greater purpose and a greater responsibility—to all the people of the country. Even just showing up for *arbakai* duty each day, before conducting any patrols or staging oneself at a checkpoint, is a potential death sentence.<sup>632</sup> The idea of defending a country, no matter how fictional a notion, may act as added fuel to put one’s life at risk.<sup>633</sup> The phenomenon also becomes a myth or belief that since they are fighting for Afghanistan then all of Afghanistan is behind them, perhaps even counting on the guardians providing a feeling of “all eyes on me” further propelling action.

#### **6.4 Clan Identity Still Relevant**

However, even though nationalism was common amongst the interviews, clan-ism still remains arguably the chief identity in Marjah. Despite thirty years of disruption and subjugation, most communities still have some sort of viable informal village or tribal leadership. Today, Afghans appear to continue to respect and identify with their village and tribal leadership most, even if leaders are new and unseasoned. According to a number of survey services over the past decade and economic development reports in Afghanistan, locals today overwhelmingly trust traditional village and tribal leadership—and seek counsel and resolution to problems from traditional governance before considering reaching out to the government.<sup>634</sup>

Before the 2001 U.S. incursion into Afghanistan, traditional rural systems faced disruption. Militant and military interdictions, civil war, tribal leader executions and exoduses, fleeing populations, returning refugees, the rise of Mullahs, and new classes of anti-Soviet Mujahidin had the potential to upend or even permanently break traditional Pashtun governance. With deaths and relocation of traditional leaders, much knowledge of historical informal governance and informal security mechanisms were all but lost in some villages. Even NATO and ISAF policies place heavy emphasis on the formal government, often at the expense of empowering informal village and tribal leaders.<sup>635</sup> Nonetheless, most *arbakai* in southern Afghanistan have consistently and openly underlined their feeling that community and clan come before all else.<sup>636</sup>

How have such systems survived decades of turmoil? First, as a whole, the Pashtun systems of governance in rural areas are resilient despite sometimes centuries of anti-tribal policies to include those years under the reign of the Soviets and Taliban. Each qawm is unique in structure, values, and fighting style leaving outside empires and armies constantly changing tactics village-by-village and tribal area-by-tribal area.<sup>637</sup> For example, though it is possible that one Russian infantry company effectively fight Afghans from one village or one Marxist government representative effectively undermine land rights in one tribal area, those same approaches would unlikely be as successful in another area. A one-size-fits all strategy to taming tribalism failed and frustrated central governments that have attempted direct rule.<sup>638</sup> The system of disparate qawm, then, acted as an overall resilience against those attempting to sideline rural Pashtun mechanisms of security and governance.

Second, qawm are individually resilient. They are nature an open egalitarian system that changes fluidly depending on the challenge and threat. Instead of a set leader that an outside power could kill to overtake a clan, leadership is most often passed on to the person that has the most influence—the person that people want to follow, whether that person is the rightful heir in a bloodline clan or not.<sup>639</sup> Power is not given within Pashtun clans but instead up to the leader to prove. There is no central brain or nervous system for an enemy to target, and the governance of qawm are rarely dependent on one person.<sup>640</sup> To outsiders, the flexibility of Pashtun rural governance may seem perplexing and ambiguous.<sup>641</sup> When under attack such as during the thirty years of chaos, rural Pashtuns seem to either temporarily go to ground or become even more diffuse and spread out.<sup>642</sup> The tradition of fluidity has made the Pashtun qawm resilient under the Mongols and Taliban alike.

A third reason for the survival of qawm is that, even if they are fluid, they are often the only consistent governance and security on which rural clans can count amidst empires and armies coming and going throughout history. Many rural Pashtuns thus feel they must, whenever possible, protect themselves, their qawm, and their qawm's way of life. Qawm often becomes the default identity in times of instability even when such instability comes at the hands of internal greater tribal warfare.<sup>643</sup> In other words, not only during the time of relative freedom of qawm to seek self-

determination were qawm important, but these identities were likely also vital for some sense of security and stability even as the qawm identity was under attack.

Contemporary Marjah is no exception. This block-qawm political system then brought forth the composition of arbakai subcommands.<sup>644</sup> It was this system, in which centuries of rural resilience found a home in exact manmade borders, that the Marjah arbakai was able to so quickly form, unify, and rise up against violent extremists. This social structure was not the reason the arbakai rose up but it was the method with which they formed and fought off Taliban.

From the beginning it was Marjah's jirga that chose to begin the arbakai comprised block elders as would be the expectation traditionally.<sup>645</sup> Ask a village where he lives, and he will first give you the block where his house or compound exists. Similarly block/qawm elders were the default arbakai sub-unit commanders. Even if tribalism was not the primary stated narrative during the interviews, the qawm systems gave way to the subdivisions and composition of the militia. Despite verbal notions of nationalism, qawm was the vehicle and process by which the fighters rose up and fought.

### **6.5 Nationalism and Qawm: Not Mutually Exclusive**

If tribalism and traditional rural Pashtun systems are still primary identities in southern Afghanistan and Marjah in particular, why would so many respondents speak to nationalism? Even the very idea of the Afghan nation—when pushed from a totalitarian and anti-tribal authority in Kabul—can threaten the identity of a tribe. Qawm tend to rebel against such centralized would-be absolute powers for some level of autonomy. However, in contemporary history to include under the Musahibin dynasty and under the current regime, the federal government has sometimes chosen a minimalist strategy that allows qawm to seek their own way of life.<sup>646</sup> Under the current regime, nationalism does not obviate clan-ism. The government of Afghanistan and any national sentiments under today's government actually allows and encourages traditional qawm systems of governance and security. Even at its inception, the government of Afghanistan sought elder input. Then, subnational

governance legal documents explicitly gave tribal and village leadership more responsibility and authority than even the district governors.

The qawm system was so prevalent in Afghanistan after three decades of war, that in 2004 the *Loya Jirga*<sup>647</sup> (tribal super-elites who met in Kabul that year) created and blessed a constitution that provided village and tribal leadership explicit authority and responsibility to govern, secure, and provide for their qawm. Informal rural leaders have, in fact, more constitutional authority than even District Governors.<sup>648</sup> The constitution and national subnational governance legal documents since 2004 specifically identify titles of qawm to include the malik, khan, mullah, *ulema* (an assembly of religious leaders), community assembly, and *mirab* (village or tribal water and irrigation expert and coordinator). The national government considers these village and tribal leaders as legitimate subnational governance leaders. Constitutionally and through federal legal decrees, these qawm leaders have the power and responsibility to maintain peace, security, order, and stability; maintain rule of law; realize and protect human rights of their followers; promote economic, educational, social, and cultural development; and provide services to the citizens in their village or tribe.<sup>649</sup>

Relative to District Governors, qawm leaders hold more legal authorities.<sup>650</sup> By statute District Governors have little power.<sup>651</sup> District Governors are direct presidential appointees with a constituency of one: the President. The President only expect them to coordinate national line ministry activities in their districts and be the President's ears and eyes at the district level. District Governors command no one. District Governors own and oversee no police or soldiers and have no issued weapons, unlike qawm leader with the constitutional authority to build *arbakai*. Furthermore, District Governors cannot directly tap into one penny of the national budget beyond basic administrative office costs. Only Provincial Governors can compete with one another for a share of the Kabul budget on an annual basis. Any projects or funded activities in a district would only be those of national line ministries who travel to a village, ISAF, Provincial Governors impeding in a District Governor's area, or a qawm leader, each who has the responsibility to deliver services on his own.<sup>652</sup> This is not to say that a District Governor could not use natural charisma and leadership skills to represent local interests and informally convince

Provincial Governments and line ministries to serve district interests. A District Governor could also use his personality and personal connections to serve as an arbiter in certain district-wide disputes. However, the District Governor's lack of legal authorities allows the qawm to exist as they do naturally and respects rural village and tribal resilience.

Essentially, the current constitution is a materialization of the historical precedence for tribal power—which, for example, the Musahibin dynasty respected and used instead of subjugated. This approach becomes especially practical for the citizens of Helmand Province, which analysts have noted is so far geographically and culturally from Kabul it is almost as if the province remains another nation and difficult to control and oversee.<sup>653</sup>

Although *arbakai* and the practice of local traditional governance systems governing by their own standards in their own way is constitutional, GIRoA's formal support for Marjah *arbakai*'s self-determination was not a fiat accompli. In practice, the government of Afghanistan is split on its support for uprisings against the Taliban. In some areas of Afghanistan, government-run media and government officials from the provincial to national level have made statements in support of popular uprisings against violent extremists and have also indicated that such movements are in fact independent. Some media have suggested that uprisings could “annihilate” Taliban vice posing a complicated long-term security threat in Afghanistan.<sup>654</sup> As just one of many examples, daily paper *Sarnawesht* in June 2012 ran an editorial stating that they wished these disparate movements would “spread to other areas where people are deprived of schools, health clinics, and other basic needs by the Taliban.”<sup>655</sup> National Directorate of Security Director Asadullah Khaled on 25 September 2012, in front of the national legislature, stated the uprisings were neither Taliban nor Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin-run nor were they anti-government. He vowed his commitment to support such movements and see to it that they keep from turning to civil strife and chaos.<sup>656</sup> Sadiq Saddiqui, spokesperson for the Ministry of the Interior, claimed no U.S. or other outside help to the uprisings which represent natural “deep hatred of the [Afghan people] against the Taliban.”<sup>657</sup>

In other areas of Afghanistan, GIRoA officials continue to be cautious about such seemingly popular anti-Taliban revolts, despite constitutional consideration for rural traditional governance, because militias may lead to independent militias and warlordism seen in the 1990s<sup>658</sup>—the type of civil strife, instability, and chaos that helped the Taliban to gain governance legitimacy.<sup>659</sup> For example, GIRoA officials have formally and informally criticized Ismail Khan’s 2012 wishes to begin his own militia in western Afghanistan<sup>660</sup> and Ahmad Zia Massoud’s 2012 public statements to begin an indigenous movement to ward off extremists and foreign elements in northern Afghanistan.<sup>661</sup> Officials fear that such moves could lead to militias that will have to contend with ALP, natural *arbakai*, and state security to gain authority, a level of monopoly of violence, and legitimacy before they ever wish to become a viable threat to Taliban.<sup>662</sup> Officials fear the internal warlordism that plagued the 1990s in Afghanistan, and suggest that warlordism in the future could perhaps even lead to similar instability that arguably helped the Taliban to gain a foothold in Afghanistan in the first place.<sup>663</sup> About one anti-Taliban militia in the eastern Afghanistan province of Ghazni, hundreds of miles from Marjah, Ghazni Provincial Council member Sayid Ubaidullah Afghan exclaimed the movement is “dangerous and harmful for the Afghan Government...the government will not be able to control [them].”<sup>664</sup>

However, even these government critics, thus far, only use their constitutional right to express their opinions and attempt to sway public opinion. There is no evidence these officials have not led security campaigns to rein in anti-extremist movements or *arbakai*. In conclusion, though there are government critics of *arbakai*, these movements nonetheless exist, are a natural millennia-old tradition amongst rural Pashtun communities, and are legal. Thus nationalism and clanism are not mutually exclusive. Effective governments in Kabul have effectively supported and encouraged local self-rule.<sup>665</sup>

Such legal authorities for traditional subnational and sub-district governance are an everyday practice in southern Helmand’s village of Marjah. This village exemplifies rural resilient governance through not only their exercise of security and governing rights but also through their a unique geographical setting that defines exactly the *qawm*—the one entity, like most Pashtun Afghan rural lands, on which residents continue to rely. Marjah used its *qawm* system to create the *arbakai* that has helped



successfully defeated local Taliban. The practice of the qawm system along with its central value of independence, as the following chapter will analyse, is a right that is legally protected by the government.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The geographic clan system within Marjah may not have served as a primary war cry of the *arbakai*, but it served as the resilient mechanism by which the militia autonomously rose and fought. Although the hypothesis of tribalism as a motivation or a goal was not a prevailing notion amongst verbal narratives of the interviewees, *qawm* mechanisms were the instrument of the militia's rise and success.

Thus far in this study has uncovered that most respondents spoke of ending eras of *fitna* and *jahiliyyah* and fighting Taliban to somehow defend the nation of Afghanistan. They were hyperbolic in their rhetoric but practical in their approach. However, throughout the interviews, declassified and unclassified reports, and actions of *arbakai* there appeared a single overriding theme of self-determination. This theme defined and coloured every *arbakai* interview response—whether speaking about stability, Taliban identity, or nationalism—as well as every operation. The following chapter will investigate this premise that underpinned the specific findings of this study.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Master Motivation: Self-Determination**

The previous chapters' findings point to a common theme of self-determination, which, for this study, means independence and freedom to control one's own fate without compulsion.<sup>666</sup> This goal of autonomy defined and coloured the motivations from the previous chapters, to include stability, antipathy to Taliban identity, and nationalism. As guardians sought stability and a future of education against a formidable opposing alien ideology, self-determination coloured their words and actions. Security and education were according to their own design and vision for which they fought autonomously. Although clan-ism was not an explicit driver of the fighters, it was the independent nature of the qawm—to seek autonomy without outside help—that revealed itself the fundamental inspiration for the subject of this case study.

Even the vocal assertion of national devotion, that the previous chapter described, ironically allowed militiamen unprecedented autonomy to fight as they wish. By outwardly claiming devotion to the country writ large—even as *arbakai* operate only in and near the village of Marjah—the militia would become less of a perceived threat to the federal government. Although constitutional law allows relative tribal independence, many government officials fear other self-driven informal armed movements that could potentially turn on the government or turn to anti-government “warlord-ism” seen in the 1990s<sup>667</sup>—the type of civil strife and chaos that helped the Taliban to gain power.<sup>668</sup> One official claimed that other, non-Marjah, anti-Taliban uprisings could be “dangerous and harmful for the Afghan Government...the government will not be able to control [them].”<sup>669</sup> With Marjah *arbakai*'s claimed loyalty to the Afghan government and nation, no government official has yet gone on record to criticize, fear, or attempt to dampen Marjah's grassroots anti-extremist movement. Instead, government officials have gone on record to verbally support Marjah's *arbakai* and underline the movement as autonomous.<sup>670</sup> Similarly, NATO forces have allowed the *arbakai*, who claim to support the central government and oppose Taliban, autonomy in its composition and operations.<sup>671</sup>

Furthermore, the goal was also, in places, a stand-alone verbal narrative and primarily defined the actions of both fighters and militia commanders. The indigenous tribal defence force members claimed that they initially did not accept money or support and were unaffiliated in any way with coalition forces or the Afghan government. They claimed that the local government leaders were okay with the defence unit's independence and stated that government security troops would not intercede when tribesmen carried weapons around the town.<sup>672</sup> Militia leaders asserted that they are independent from government help and control. They are a self-proclaimed autonomous force without outside help or coercion.<sup>673</sup>

The militia did not just call for self-determination. It acted each day as if it already possessed and protected its autonomy from outside influence. In the psyche of villagers and militiamen alike is the notion that Marjah is on its own. When ISAF withdraws, it will be up to the villagers to keep security in the village.<sup>674</sup> Villagers view the Afghan Army and Police as corrupt and ineffective when compared to the *arbakai*. Some villages believe that the Taliban and warlords in northern Helmand will inevitably take control most parts of southern and southwest Afghanistan upon U.S. withdrawal. Therefore, it is up to the villagers themselves to defend their ground today as they plan to tomorrow. They feel they are alone. They may look for better weapons and training from ISAF to fight Taliban, but they believe that the village alone is responsible for its own security and future.<sup>675</sup> While other villages throughout Afghanistan are reportedly terrified of a Taliban resurgence once ISAF departs, and some even predict a complete collapse of the government,<sup>676</sup> Marjah's guardians deliberately and autonomously secured their village and intended to secure the future of the village according to their own will.

Also, self-determination was absolute: it went beyond just opposition to and independence from Taliban. Marjahns appeared to oppose all entities—not just the Taliban—that wished to compromise the village's autonomy. Although the Taliban were an especially hated enemy of villagers, many locals also had previously opposed the Soviets, the Akhundzada militias in the 1990s,<sup>677</sup> and the drug lords that eventually sided with the Taliban in the 2000s.<sup>678</sup> ISAF and GIRoA support the independence of Marjah's *arbakai* and afford Marjah unparalleled autonomy, so it was logical that the militiamen would have no reason to oppose the government or NATO.

Instead partnering with NATO and the government would allow the town the regional security and minimal support to conduct activities as it sees fit.

This chapter will first introduce the oral stories of the guardian revealing a movement primarily defined as an independence movement. In the next section, the actions of the militia, especially when the salaries ceased, showed dedicated self-determination. It will then move on to the leaders words and actions that showed autonomy as a central motivation. In the following part, this chapter will look to the theme of liberation in greater context including its strength as an historical materialization of values that has inspired other similar contemporary anti-Taliban uprisings. Finally, this chapter will then move to how ISAF allowed self-determination. This part of the story is vital because, despite doctrine and orders that called for heavy “top-down” NATO control over the *arbakai*, the troops on the ground instead enabled *arbakai* independent action and aims. Not only does foreign security force action help prove that the *arbakai* acted truly autonomously, but it also bolstered and secured militia’s theme of self-determination.

### **7.1 Fighters’ Claims of Self-Determination**

During the interviews, respondents spoke about a goal of self-determination via means anchored in self-sufficiency. It was as if this militia would have acted independently of GIRoA and ISAF if given the opportunity. Most *arbakai* interviewed expressed a self-drive to fight Taliban, as if the programs offered from the Marines were only helpful in efforts underway. Many respondents appeared to view the *arbakai* as simply a mechanical and practical means to materialize their personal drive: “I joined the [*arbakai*] because I wanted more ammunition and a machine gun to fight my enemy—the Taliban. The [*arbakai*] support me in my efforts to fight the Taliban” (67). Without prompting, others appeared offended at notions that they served because of financial incentive: “I don’t need a salary for this. I joined the [*arbakai*] only to fight the enemy. This is my only reason for joining the [*arbakai*]. I don’t need money. I have to fight [the Taliban]. The [*arbakai*] is my vehicle, my method, to be able to fight the Taliban. This is what I want—even without money” (87).

The following excerpts particularly underline the dual theme of seeking village and personal goals through independent action. The fighters seemed to not count on any outside government support but instead appeared to rely only on themselves. While some respondents specifically spoke of “freedom” from Taliban rule others used the village-wide narrative of security and education as a way to express a future free of unwanted Taliban control:

*The [arbakai] support(s) me with weapons and ammunition and everything I need to fight. They are a means to do what I want to do. They allow me the tools to fight and kill Taliban. [The Taliban] are the enemy of all of us. Everyone in Marjah would agree with me. They would agree that the Taliban bring nothing but death and destruction. They Taliban are invaders. They would agree with me that they only bring death. They are the embodiment of conflict and everything that is can get in the way of a peaceful and productive society. I will fight until the day comes (yelling furiously) WHEN AFGHANISTAN IS CLEAN OF THE TALIBAN. I WILL FIGHT UNTIL AFGHANISTAN IS CLEAN. Clean of the Taliban completely.*  
– (110)

*[Arbakai] offer me the support I needed—the support I sought—to do what I wanted to do. They were a vehicle for my own ambitions—for my personal goals. The government offers the weapons and ammunition. They offer the practical materials that I need to fight off the Taliban. They offer the tools for me to do what I need to do. The Taliban brought fighting. And they failed, also, to bring any constructive policies. They did not nor could they build up anything or create any type of societal self-sufficiency. They only break and destroy things. And this is very easy for them—to destroy. And that is what they are—breakers and destroyers only. I will fight all the time—for my entire life. I am dedicated for all the years that I live on this earth.* – (101)

*I will fight until I truly feel freedom and security. I will fight until this...The Taliban are our enemy. They do not conduct any good policies. They do not do good works. I have to fight them....I need to support Afghanistan and the government. The [militiamen] support the government. I need to support the efforts against the Taliban. I want to help and support my country. Before there were more Taliban. Now in Marjah the [arbakai has] come together. We do not want the Taliban to come back again. My children fear the Taliban. The Taliban burn books and schools down. My children want a future of education. They want peace. They will never support the Taliban. The Taliban only do what benefits them. They only do for themselves.*  
– (72)

More often than not respondents expressed self-reliance and autonomy while expressing their views on stability, Taliban identity, and nationalism. Interviewees typically included a multitude of goals and motivations—addressing stability, Taliban ideology and violence, and patriotism in streams of consciousness—with underpinnings of the overriding motif of self-determination. For example, militia member Safar Khan suggested to media outlets, “[a]ll we want is to protect our areas and ourselves. We will fight with anyone who destabilizes our local area, who enters our homes, prevents our children from going to school and creates anarchy in our peaceful lives.”<sup>679</sup> Another member Malang exclaimed before foreign press, “We are compelled to take a stand and provide security in our area, in clinics, schools...”<sup>680</sup> The following interviewee spoke about the need for security, the desire to create the conditions for educational opportunities for youth, Taliban’s foreign and unwelcome nature, and violent extremist cruelty:

*The Taliban do not want security in Marjah or Helmand. They do not allow children—girls and boys—to get an education. The Taliban do not want peace in Afghanistan. All the people in Marjah are good people and hate the Taliban...The Taliban do not want security. They cause problems with farmers. Before the Taliban we grew wheat. People want education and want to bring security, cattle, and productive farms. They do not want the Taliban here...I don’t know if Taliban are Muslims. Most are from Pakistan. Rules in Islam do not dictate us to kill people, to cut necks, or to kill local nationals. The holy book does not allow this. For example, a few weeks ago, an [arbakai] commander’s friend was captured and killed. His hands were tied behind his back, and his head was cut off. – (35)*

In the same conversation, he expressed personal and communal self-sufficiency and reliance to actualize his goals. The road to autonomy for this and other respondents were defined with a sense of independence. In this part of his response, the civilian guardian does not call on GIROA security to defend the village or formal government departments to provide services. Instead he states that independent action of the villagers will yield their common goals:

*The elders wanted peace so they made the decision to fight back and repel the Taliban. I heard about the other militias in Marjah, and so I built one too. I began to advise villagers telling them that we need security. We need to build bridges, schools, and educational centres.*

*The Taliban did not like this advice. Most of the Taliban are from Pakistan and have come into Afghanistan. My children and even wife are ready to fight. We have weapons and a "canon." If the Taliban come to my compound, even my wife is ready to fight...I will fight forever. – (35)*

Many militiamen's sense of dedication to the cause of autonomy from Taliban rule was such that they explicitly stated a sense of personal duty that would span years. Among the interviews with Marjahns, about half of militia fighters claimed outright that they would fight the Taliban to the death or for the rest of their lives. Over a third claimed their sons would continue the fight, and a few even claimed that their wives would continue the battle against the Taliban in a community that has little place for women outside the home.

*All the time that the Taliban are here in our country I will fight them. If they are breathing. If they are operating. If they are physically in Afghanistan, then I will fight them to the death. This is how dedicated I am. Truthfully. When they are older, my children, they will have education. They will support and help the government. They will support and help the military. – (111)*

*I will fight as long as I still have the strength to fight. I have the will to fight on as long as it takes to expel the Taliban from the country and defeat them. So it is up to the strength and ability of my body to keep fighting. The children of the town want a future full of schools, education, freedom, and peace. They are fully aware that the Taliban could never bring these things. Kids know that the Taliban would block any positive and constructive community efforts. Thus, the Taliban, by definition, are the enemy of the children. – (113)*

*I will fight for as long as it takes until there is peace earned. I will fight until there is not one enemy. I will fight until we have education. I will fight until we have everything we want...We are peaceful here. We did not bring this on ourselves. We did not ask for the Taliban's invasion and the violence that they brought. We were already here. We didn't go to another country and start fighting there. It was brought upon us. I want to defend and live in my village in peace. And since the Taliban mean conflict in our mind, we must fight the Taliban until there is peace. By definition the Taliban cannot allow us to live in peace. They cannot allow us to live without conflict. They are not Afghans. Not true Afghans. They are from the outside. Their tactics are from the outside. Their ideals and types of violence are from the outside. They invaded and brought fighting. Fighting is not what we want or asked for. We were not fighting in this town. They came and*

*brought conflict, fighting, and violent to an area that did not want it. To an area that did not ask for it. To an area that did not deserve it. –*  
(101)

These claims of self-sufficiency and desired autonomy underlined a strong resilience in the arbakai that have the potential to outlast any future Taliban attempts to influence or infiltrate the village.<sup>681</sup> Militiamen had confidence in themselves and their martial savvy, had a belief in something far larger than themselves such as the stability and independence of an entire village, and found resolve that transcended the pain and worry of Taliban retribution.<sup>682</sup> They felt that they controlled their own fate and that it was up only to them.<sup>683</sup> Specifically, they saw these trying times—of fighting and dying for a village—as leading to an end of improvement for their village and children including stability, security, and education.

## **7.2 Guardians' Autonomous Actions**

Their claims of self-determination were not empty. One arbakai fighter (respondent 8) even exclaimed, “my oath is my AK” to underline that his proof of commitment was in his actions and not words. Marjah’s militiamen fought actively with little support. Beyond just showing up to work—a certain death sentence if the Taliban catches them<sup>684</sup>—and finding and reporting IEDs and Taliban activity, arbakai showed an offensive side. Arbakai members went on hunter-killer missions to arrest or kill Taliban well outside their particular blocks, which they protect foremost. Marjah guardians proudly told me of running ahead of Marines into oncoming fire in the desert regions to the east and west of the city on their own volition. Some claimed to go into the poppy growing outskirts of town where Taliban lay low and run a drug trade.<sup>685</sup> Such aggression continues today. Arbakai are known to push, still, the security out to areas well outside the village and have even burned stores, whose owners apparently are linked with Taliban elements, to the ground.<sup>686</sup> As one U.S. Marine exclaimed, any militiaman “isn’t afraid to hunt down Taliban fighters.”<sup>687</sup> With prejudice and a sense of self-efficiency, arbakai killed Taliban.

One example of this aggression, self-reliance, and independent spirit was the successful defeat of a large Taliban assault in 2012. With Taliban’s leadership in



Quetta, Pakistan calling for jihad on Marjah's militia, the Taliban attempted to take back Marjah en masse with numerous well-armed cells working in unison. They began taking over compound-by-compound from the north announcing to all that they would retake the village and implement Taliban laws once again. The arbakai stopped the assault and brutally slaughtered those Taliban that did not flee—leaving the dead and mangled Taliban corpses out in the fields for days to send a “message” to the Taliban.<sup>688</sup> Although daily reports indicate Marjah's arbakai patrolled their streets within their blocks, sometimes united into offensive hunter-killer teams, and killed or captured Taliban that happened to make it inside the village itself, the 2012 victory underpins the ferocity and tenacity of a militia that views they alone must secure their village.

In addition this evidence and talk of independence and independent action, the lack of enticing financial incentive underlines the independence with which arbakai fought and for which the fighters held as an enduring goal. Over the years since its inception, there were disparate and unsubstantiated reports of individual fighters complaining of low salaries sometimes along with wishes for more ammunition and weapons, but such apparent complaints never appeared to stop any operations or impel any to leave service.<sup>689</sup> Fighters continued to fight despite low salaries and despite periods without salaries. Money failed to motivate Marjah's guardians. They rose up via their block systems without promise of significant or continuous financial reimbursement and continued to act autonomously through periods of low and no pay.

Marjah militiamen continued to fight for months on separate occasions without wages, as it did in its first days.<sup>690</sup> Specifically, the only U.S.-backed arbakai movement—whether part of a Special Operations initiative or a conventional forces unit's strategy—that fought without pay was Marjah's. While every other government-backed lashkar or arbakai halted when salaries were cut, Marjah's guardians continued to fight as its leaders did in the beginning.<sup>691</sup>

When it came to salaries, one must study what relative riches the guardian forfeited. Militiamen gave up working on highly lucrative Commanders Emergency Response Program and Field Ordering Officer military projects and USAID contracts, which tended to hire locally and pay salaries that would be competitive in the United

States—vastly outcompeting the money offered to arbakai volunteers.<sup>692</sup> Everyday a militiaman fought was a day when that person knowingly sacrificed a wage many times larger.

Relative to other jobs arbakai members could have undertaken, they received a modest monthly salary from Marines that, on paper and in theory, was the equivalent of \$150 U.S. dollars per month in 2011 lowered to \$120 U.S. dollars per month in 2013.<sup>693</sup> This wage was likely stripped down for a popularly accepted and practiced “tax” to block elders and commanders—who most often used these “taxes” for their community lest rumours of egregious corruption weaken their power in such an egalitarian society.<sup>694</sup>

Because the salary did not provide a liveable wage even by Afghanistan standards, civilian warriors supplemented their income so that they would not have to abandon the militia to return to their farms full-time. Most arbakai members were moonlighting as only part-time farmers,<sup>695</sup> and on occasion set up checkpoints to ask money from locals. Such a practice, in the West, one could view as corruption and exploitation of a population.<sup>696</sup> But given the local popularity of arbakai and a lack of public backlash against armed tribesmen’s occasional and modest “taxation,” it appeared that “shake-downs”<sup>697</sup> were nothing new or egregious in the culture of Marjah.<sup>698</sup> Locals appeared to understand that arbakai fighters gave up full-time farming for securing the village. Some Western observers even likened militia “taxation” to U.S. city all-volunteer fire departments seeking donations for services. However, this rough analogy falls a bit short as firemen in America do not wield AK-47s when asking civilians for funds.

Overall, these shakedowns appeared rare and minor compared to the exploitation of other formal Afghan security entities in Marjah. For example, one villager, upon learning of an unsubstantiated report of one arbakai member asking for cash from a civilian, commented that if the culprit had instead been part of the Taliban or Afghan National Police, that person would have stolen “wallets, motorcycles, and watches.”<sup>699</sup> Amidst claims of Afghan National Police and Army apparently wantonly stealing motorbikes, clothes, water pumps, cell phones, and shop goods, the arbakai are seen as local heroes that tended not to abuse their positions. Amidst

unsubstantiated villager claims of national soldiers and cops sexually assaulting women, extorting locals for cash, releasing Taliban prisoners in return for money, threatening local Marjah contractors with death, using positions of authority to make money flagrantly at the expense of security, and breaking and entering homes to steal on a regular basis, locals view Marjah *arbakai* as relatively decent.<sup>700</sup> The *arbakai* appeared to take what they needed but seemed to avoid the appearance of avarice. They seemed to value public opinion and continued to operate only within the limits allowed by their block elders.

*Arbakai* salary, though low once it reached the pockets of guardians, was nevertheless potentially one steady source of partial income for the illiterate and unskilled volunteers. When this money turned off, the militia continued to fight undaunted—revealing the determination of a movement set on independence from any outside support. Elsewhere in Pakistan and Afghanistan government-backed *lashkar* or *arbakai* programs see negotiation, cessation, protest, riot, or insurrection at first rumour of dwindling funds.<sup>701</sup> This was not the case in Marjah. Marjah militiamen stayed and fought when salaries halted. Due to a set of events and administrative mishandling, Marjah *arbakai* remained unpaid for two months during the height of the fighting season in 2011 and again on several occasions over the next two years. Nevertheless, Marjah *arbakai* fought on—killing Taliban, helping to fight off suicide attacks, dying in the line of duty, and maintaining security. Compared to similar programs' near or complete shutdown during financial crises, Marjah *arbakai* appears unique in the strength of its self-drive.

In late June 2011—after the harvest season and well into the throes of the annual Taliban fighting cycle—battalions responsible for *arbakai* salaries were unable to renew the contract that would have left the militia salary scheme unmolested. The original contract was for half a year, and the renewal would have been for an additional six months.<sup>702</sup> But Marine Division command staff denied renewal because the would-be-new contract was for the Commander's Emergency Relief Program money, meant only for tactical emergencies on a short-term and unplanned basis—some staffer balked at *arbakai* salaries being of a short-term crisis status because the *arbakai* was a years-long program.<sup>703</sup> Unfortunately for U.S. Marine Corps battalions in Marjah in 2011, they only submitted paperwork for more

emergency money instead of attempting to tap into other funding sources that some thought more appropriate. Some argued that it was a failure of higher commands for refusing to take the initiative to resubmit the paperwork on behalf of the busy battalions for alternative non-emergency funding while others felt the blame was on the battalions' paperwork incompetency.<sup>704</sup> There may have been no one to blame, but the outcome was clear. This administrative crisis paralyzed arbakai money for two months.

After two months of miscommunication and confusion, a regimental comptroller along with division command staff, the division judge advocate, and battalion officers rewrote and resubmitted language to successfully justify Commander's Emergency Relief Program funds because Marine commanders felt the program was vital.<sup>705</sup> Throughout the financial crisis the arbakai neither rebelled nor laid down arms during the heart of the Helmand fighting season. There was not one single report of a fighter not showing up to a post due to money concerns, not one rumour of teams protesting, and not a case of arbakai commanders threatening ISAF or the district government. There have also been disparate and unsubstantiated reports of infrequent and late salary payments more recently.<sup>706</sup> For example, some villagers and arbakai fighters even claimed that as late as January 2013 they had not been paid the previous four to five months.<sup>707</sup> Yet, the militia continued to operate seemingly un-dazed.

This set of events revealed Marjah militias to be willing and able to operate, kill, and die independent of money. That money is not a primary driving motivation of Marjah militias reveals a certain level of autonomy and self-motivation. Relying on a force whose primary aim is not money echoes Niccolo Machiavelli's admonitory statement "...if one holds his state on the basis of mercenary arms, he will never be firm or secure; because they are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, unfaithful; gallant among friends, vile among enemies; no fear of God, no faith with men; and one defers ruin insofar as one defers the attack; and in peace you are despoiled by them, in war by the enemy."<sup>708</sup> Though perhaps colourful and dramatic, this statement illustrates a contrast to what witnesses observed in Marjah. More so, Marjah arbakai operating with little or no wages may signal not only dedication but also longevity—a drive that could potentially keep fighters fighting past ISAF transition, drawdown, and withdrawal. As one ISAF officer cautioned, "money can buy you temporary security,

but if you want to know who will stay fighting past when [NATO] leaves you need to look for those that will fight without a dime.”<sup>709</sup>

To understand the extent of dedicated self-determination in this town, it is helpful to briefly examine movements similar to Marjah’s when money ceased. In most cases, the anti-Taliban indigenous uprisings ceased when funding terminated pointing to the extraordinary independent nature of the subject of this particular case study. Marjah’s *arbakai* shows a profound level of self-sufficiency and self-drive when compared to other movements that appeared somewhat to fall victim to Machiavelli’s warning that those that operate for money may indeed be relatively fickle regarding their willingness to fight and die.

It should be noted that, unlike this study, the information from these other movements derives from local press and military observations. There were no critical studies or sets of interviews to verify the stories of these other anti-Taliban *arbakai* or *lashkars*. Nevertheless, there was ample information that would lead to a conclusion that these other uprisings did indeed cease once leaders of these movements saw promised money undelivered or salaries.

These other efforts, in the descriptions below, paralyzed awaiting undelivered promised salaries, projects, or contracts. Without initiative, will, and self-sufficiency, these other movements could draw on no value that would have impelled them to fight Taliban—in stark contrast to Marjah’s exceptional sense of autonomy:

- For example, in 2009 in the Achin district of Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan, vengeance may have sparked the Shinwari tribal uprising against Taliban, but the incentive of money appeared to be the main motivation for its would-be endurance.<sup>710</sup> After an initial revenge-driven spark, cash seems to have become a driver for Shinwari. These clan members reportedly promised \$1.2 million U.S. dollars in aid directly to the elders without intermediaries. In early 2011, Shinwaris bemoaned to the media that supposedly only \$200,000 U.S. dollars had yet been dispensed.<sup>711</sup> Without the promised cash along with ensuing infighting amongst sub-tribes the movement retarded and then stopped. Soon after, violent extremist militants begun to move through some Shinwari areas freely.<sup>712</sup>
- The location of a similar example, also in 2011, was the Arghandab River Valley in northern Kandahar province, adjacent to Helmand. Development

projects from U.S. Army civil affairs programs appeared to have been a driving factor for the village's self-defence. Combined Task Force 1-320 Commander Lieutenant Colonel David S. Flynn (U.S. Army) stated to the press in January 2011 that he had told the village shura he would rebuild a mosque as a reward for the villagers' mobilization as an incentive to recruit civilian guardians. Once projects slowed and then ceased, civilian warriors and would-be recruits quickly returned to the lives of farming.<sup>713</sup>

- Likewise, in the Gizab district of Uruzgan Province just northeast of Helmand in 2010, an anti-Taliban uprising came to sudden stop when the money dried up. Militia members publicly asked for cash and direct support for the service of policing; the militia leaders went to Australian and U.S. Special Forces for help immediately when the revolt began. Australian then U.S. forces, however, only arrived to provide tactical support—no wages in the beginning.<sup>714</sup> By the end of June 2010, residents of Gizab had become frustrated at the lack of government and ISAF financial support.<sup>715</sup> They claimed that the Afghan government-authorized 53-man civilian police team with a compensation of \$60 U.S. dollars per-month per-troop was far too little to retain an active militia and continue to stave off the Taliban.<sup>716</sup> While awaiting higher bidders, the movement dithered and failed.<sup>717</sup>
- In 2011, in the Adezai village of the Peshawar district in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province near Afghanistan's eastern border, money was also a driver for anti-Taliban civilian forces. In March 2011, tribal militias from this and adjacent villages threatened to surrender completely because they claimed not to have ample money and weapons to continue the counter-violent-extremist activities.<sup>718</sup> Between the government and lashkar accounts, it became clear that these once-government-backed lashkars did not have the ideological drive equal to militant Taliban who have been willing to fight and die with or without material support.<sup>719</sup> Eventually, locals' lack of will and insufficient ammunition allowed the Taliban to retake areas around the village via rocket attacks, suicide bombings, and IEDs. In Adezai, insecurity stopped locals from attending schools or walking to markets.<sup>720</sup>
- Over 400 kilometres east of Kabul in Pakistan is the town of Matta in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province's Swat district. There, in 2009, former national minister and leader of the 2009 ruling Awami National Party raised a lashkar to help the military combat Taliban elements. 3,000 Pakistanis joined to fight Taliban and help rebuild Swat infrastructure. After its inception, the tribal leaders negotiated that their men would only continue fighting upon delivery of development projects. Without robust reconstruction activities, the anti-Taliban activities waned.<sup>721</sup>

These movements, by comparison, highlight the extraordinary dedication to self-reliance and independence Marjah held. Even when other Afghan and Pakistani counter-Taliban movements began as natural uprisings using traditional Pashtun governance apparatus, these particular movements, unlike Marjah, ceased when

funding stopped. I was as if these movements perhaps wished to act as mercenaries or perhaps were even a scheme to squeeze out funding from outside sources. There was most often an expiration date when funding or funded projects terminated. Marjah's unique dedication to independence and self-reliance was not only evidenced in fighters' words and actions but also in its leadership. As the next section describes, leaders' narratives and decisions also underline the theme of self-determination.

### **7.3 Arbakai Leaders Seek Independence**

Arbakai leaders appeared especially self-driven and self-sufficient, and they led by their example and legend.<sup>722</sup> Such an egalitarian culture demands that leaders must continuously prove themselves, and followers must wish to follow them voluntarily and willingly.<sup>723</sup> In addition, Pashtun culture, and especially that which existed in Marjah, puts an emphasis on personal shame if a leader were to act cowardly in the eyes of his followers or detract from the goals and desires of his militiamen.<sup>724</sup> Therefore, studying the leaders is vital, as their actions and narratives commonly reflect those locals that comprise the qawm, which must prove worthy of leading on a daily basis.

Marjah top arbakai commanders Haji Baazgul Khan and Motar Khan's public announcements and interviews revealed that the phenomenon of self-determination was the singular overriding motivation for rising and fighting Taliban. These messages also reverberated throughout the fighting force.<sup>725</sup> It should be noted that the international media reported on these two leaders names, identities, titles, and actions. The leaders appeared to wish to speak with reporters and have their stories told. Therefore, unlike with other arbakai members, whose identity this study hides, this chapter will use identities and information that do not put the individuals at increased risk above what the press has already published.

At the conclusion of the 2010 summer season of fighting, former anti-Soviet mujahid and block elder Haji Baazgul Khan began meeting with other block elders to increase the size of his militia and help others build militias also. By November 2010, he announced to media outlets he had raised 150 of fellow block farmers as one initial arbakai movement to repel the Taliban that would soon be followed with other blocks

dedicating units to protect the village.<sup>726</sup>

Marjah's block elders and arbakai commanders appear to be motivated and resolute in their determination to fight and kill Taliban and appear to be well received throughout the blocks.<sup>727</sup> They were not, however, beneficiaries of formal government positions and formal government authority.<sup>728</sup> Instead, they were former mujahidin,<sup>729</sup> who continued their legend through contemporary battles against Taliban cells in and around Marjah.<sup>730</sup> Marjah is a warrior culture with a warrior mindset and ethos, like many Pashtun areas.<sup>731</sup> The populace seemed to respect and follow war-hardened leaders.<sup>732</sup>

No one handed commanders titles, but instead they earned their posts through their dedication to lead the village to self-determination. Proving their worth each day, block elders were charismatic linchpins without formal government titles that rose and stayed in position due to their leadership skills and tactical savvy.<sup>733</sup> Qawm leaders continued putting themselves in harm's way to spark enthusiasm and devotion amongst the guardians. Arbakai commanders have no career path and nowhere to rise professionally. Their meagre salaries do not seem to be a driving force. Instead volunteering to prove themselves as warrior leaders each day appeared to be their immediate professional aim: to create an aura, according to commanders' followers, of charisma.<sup>734</sup>

The informal but ubiquitously respected commander Haji Baazgul Khan<sup>735</sup> was "fiercely" independent, a warrior of the anti-Soviet mujahidin, and a natural leader who eschewed several offers of governmental appointments in favour of defending his qawm against the Taliban.<sup>736</sup> Baazgul graduated from a self-driven low-intensity counter-Taliban insurgent during the Taliban's realm in Marjah to the relatively informal local Interim Community Council Chair to an influential arbakai commander who nonetheless did not encroach on other blocks' independence.

Numerous Marines and Afghans described Baazgul as a walking legend. When he enters a room, everyone stands and instantly makes a path for him to walk to his seat.<sup>737</sup> The district governor's guards—charged to thoroughly search anyone and everyone attempting to enter the governor's compound—do not dare pat down



Baazgul or any of his deputies.<sup>738</sup> His reputation as an exterminator of Taliban is unquestioned.<sup>739</sup> His legend, his presence, and his integrity are unquestioned by locals and foreigners.<sup>740</sup> Independent and resilient is how ISAF views this man: a visionary of a strong anti-Taliban sustainable immune system. Locals fear Baazgul's demise or retirement.<sup>741</sup> Agreeing on Baazgul's influence as a charismatic are the violent extremists—evidenced with Taliban's attacks against his family and in his neighbourhood.

Even in his old age, he appears to continue to be a front-line commander willing to lead by example. He checks on his security teams and appears undaunted even during firefights.<sup>742</sup> His deputies joked in the summer of 2011 about just one of the times Baazgul personally fired a rocket-propelled grenade at Taliban cell causing total loss of the hearing in his left ear. During our conversation, he appeared unable to hear at all in his left ear giving possible credence to this tale. He appears to inspire a feeling in others to fight against Taliban. Like many of his qawm leader colleagues, his legend had made him even more influential than the District Governor.

His modesty and seeming unconcern for his own safety and fame underline the charisma that his followers feel. When this researcher met first with him in the centre of an empty large tent in 135-degree heat, he—a quiet charismatic more interested in action than words—looked at the ground and gave brief answers. He appeared to have no care that international press and academics in Washington, DC and London wrote about his feats. He did not bat an eye that he is an internationally known figure. He even appeared unimpressed that English-language online media had reported his personal travails and victories.

When interviewed in the summer of 2011, he spoke of the Taliban viciously killing his brother—confirmed through by numerous sources<sup>743</sup>—since being the first qawm elder to command an arbakai sub-unit. Baazgul found his brother's remains in an open hole in the ground; the brother was not afforded a proper Islamic burial.<sup>744</sup> He mentioned in an interview:

*They not only killed my uncle they killed my two sons. They killed my family. They targeted me because I am an honest person living right*

*here in Marjah doing the right thing. They brought this to me. They kill people here. (I will fight) for life. This is clear. [The Taliban] are not Muslims. They do not act like Muslims.*

It may never be completely clear if he is personally driven by grief, vengeance, purely village independence, blood feud, an increase in political sway of his minority ethnic tribe the Daftani,<sup>745</sup> or all of the above.<sup>746</sup> But it appears clear that immediate power and fame are not major factors. Furthermore, his efforts were not a revenge-filled reactionary counter-revolution against Taliban. On the contrary, he orchestrated guardians' initial rise the moment he was afforded an initial security bubble from absolute Taliban repression. He went on to help actively secure and stabilize their village and offer the opportunity for education. A drive towards independence from any future violent extremist incursion appeared his underlying narrative for why he rose up and continued to put his life on the line.

Understanding well and accepting his mortality amidst a war in which he remains a primary Taliban target, Baazgul ordained a deputy who wields personal charisma in addition to the influence naturally afforded to anyone dubbed Baazgul's second-in-command. This charismatic chief lieutenant, named "Masoud" (for the purposes of this study, his true identity will remain hidden—even though the press publishes his identity, he is not as well known as the others) from a different block than Baazgul. Like Baazgul, Masoud's charisma allows him to lead followers into battle and possible death and allows him to enter any meeting in Marjah to speak openly with top visiting political leaders. When Masoud speaks, the government listens. Like Baazgul, actions appeared to spark or at least strengthen Masoud's charisma. In battle, Masoud appeared undaunted and resolute.<sup>747</sup> He has been known to fight Taliban with hunter-killer teams outside Marjah proper and fight in bright white robes alongside Marines without permission or coordination—the blaringly white tunics possibly making him a greater target in a firefight to show bravery.<sup>748</sup> In addition to this warrior nature, Masoud also has a unique penchant towards economic development. Accepting his lack of academic credentials having never attended trade school or any type of secondary education, he often speaks with his Kabul University-graduate brother in Kandahar about practical development issues that may help to help Marjah. Specifically, Masoud, with his brother's counsel, had begun in 2011 to build fish farms and help farmers irrigate fields more effectively in Marjah. Masoud

knows his own intellectual limitations and thus admittedly counts on an advisor—a sign of modesty and perhaps effective leadership. Like Baazgul and other qawm leaders and deputies, his day-to-day leadership for his qawm afford him influence instead of a title or acknowledgement from ISAF or GIRoA.

His words were similar to those of other interview respondents—expressing self-drive and autonomy along with a deep hatred of Taliban actions:

*...Taliban do not want security. They do not want to improve Afghanistan. They offer nothing by destruction. They are cowards. They are backwards..Taliban take everyone hostage. Every person hostage. In Marjah they only allowed people to grow poppy. SO, WE ROSE UP AGAINT THE TALIBAN. We do not allow Taliban in my block. I will not allow Taliban in MY country. I PUNCH THE TALIBAN IN THE FACE. MY AK IS MY OATH. What other type of promise—what other type of oath—could be more certain...In Marjah, people generally want peace. Just 10% want to help the Taliban. The other 90% want peace...If the Taliban want to join society then fine. If they want to reintegrate, that is okay. But if not, then I will fight the Taliban for the rest of my life. I will never allow, while alive, the Taliban to come into my community...My son, who is only 7 years old, already says he wants to fight the Taliban on the frontlines. He raises his arms up like his is holding a weapons and says he really want to fight on the front right now...The Taliban are not Muslims. They are terrorists. The Taliban defame Islam. They are against Islam. Islam is a good religion. Islam knows good. Islam wants peace—as most people in Marjah want peace and are good Muslims.*

Aside from Baazgul and Masoud, there are only two others this study can identify and discuss because these two appear in open source online reporting. Another arbakai commander is Marjah's reportedly most aged elder and former anti-Soviet mujahidin commander Haji Mator Khan who had left Marjah prior to 2010 to hide out in Helmand's capital until the Marines cleared most Taliban from Marjah.<sup>749</sup> Mator Khan, unlike some other self-assigned fervently anti-Taliban Marjah residents hiding out in Lashkargah, quickly fulfilled his promise to return to Marjah. Possibly driven by the death of his son at the hands of the Taliban, Mator Khan used his sway as the most senior elder<sup>750</sup> to raise a Marjah militia unit in his block after Baazgul's initial efforts. With his clout and understanding of historical informal governance, Mator Khan inspired numerous other Marjah blocks to dedicate militiamen.<sup>751</sup>

Like Masoud and the rest of the militiamen, Mator Khan was able to weave together a rich narrative of personal loss, nationalism, and determined fortitude to rise up independently against Taliban for a future of village autonomy:

*I lost my son and lost much of my family to the Taliban. I am 55 years old and oppose the Taliban. I will never willingly allow the Taliban back into Marjah. This I swear...Islam does not allow Muslims to kill innocents. And the Taliban kills Muslims and everyone. Everyone is innocent. Everyone is neutral. No matter your religion. And Islam does not allow killing—especially killing of innocents. Afghanistan does not want Taliban, nor does Afghanistan want the Taliban culture. The Taliban are from Pakistan, and Pakistan is the source of the Taliban. The Afghan Taliban are not strong. All misery is due ultimately to Pakistan. Pakistan creates the suicide bombers. It is Waziristan from where they come. That is where most of the Taliban are. They do not want security or peace. Like in Pakistan, where there is no peace and security, the Taliban want Afghanistan to be the same thing. They want a place and a culture of fighting. And Afghanistan will not want to lose its culture. And the Taliban will interfere with our culture. We must talk with the Taliban and see if they will join the government. We must teach them and make them realize that life is good, and they can join society. If the Taliban do not want this—if they do not wish to re-join society—then the Afghans will fight the Taliban and fight them for however long is necessary. My sons, local children, and everyone around here hate the Taliban. My sons go to school, but the Taliban would never allow this. And this fact upsets my children. My children, like the other children around here, are keenly aware of this. And are upset about the Taliban for this reason.*

While Baazgul, Masoud, and Mator Khan may be considered the most influential and important charismatic leaders of the 400-strong fighting force, some individual fighters also appear to embody an inspiring and almost berserker charisma to push out violent extremist and attain autonomy. One such guardian saturated local contemporary folklore, and with such name recognition he has likely made it high on the local Taliban hit list. This person known only as Koko Jan is said to have run down the street alone after gun-wielding Taliban with only a knife. Alone, he enjoyed running out into the desert outside Marjah to hunt and kill Taliban members: “Marine sources maintain that Koko Jan [one of the first to join the militias] was observed running after several Taliban into the desert alone, and that he successfully shot the perpetrators.”<sup>752</sup> His stories grew to legend amongst arbakai and ISAF members alike. Today he also finds his way to visiting western media sources on his own

volition to speak about his dedication to self-determination, apparently unconcerned with his high profile bringing the possibility of especially acute Taliban retribution.<sup>753</sup>

Without formal GIRoA appointment, Marjah arbakai charismatics have earned an authority over militiamen. Their dedication and almost berserker attitude towards undauntedly killing Taliban at great risk to their own health, lives, and families likely inspire, spark, or at least strengthen Marjah arbakai's enduring operations against the Taliban. With such figures at the helm of this southern Helmandi movement, it is no surprise that arbakai goals to self-determination are resolute and committed each day.

Observers of Marjah's arbakai might wonder why the village would not descend into fighting amongst the many qawm—with powerful and armed block elders turning on one another for more power. An observer may also wonder why the theme of self-determination is ubiquitous. The answer is in Marjah's geography. The block system creates a balance of power for Marjah. If one block or one block elder gains too much power, the other block elders will unite to check his power. Additionally, when Marjahns want to elect a district governor or mullah, they typically want someone from outside Marjah, so that no one man disrupts the delicate balance. In short, the block system helps to cut down on the possibility of warlord-ism and helps to promote unity.<sup>754</sup>

This balance of power may also help to ensure the relative unanimity of goals of those interviewed for this study. If all the blocks agree to a decision—for example, to raise an arbakai to gain village autonomy—then arbakai followers may feel confident that the entire village upholds any decree.<sup>755</sup> Such unity allowed the arbakai to rise up block-by-block like dominos.<sup>756</sup> One officer described the spread as “viral.”<sup>757</sup> While other natural anti-Taliban uprisings flail before dissolving into intra and inter-tribal disputes,<sup>758</sup> Marjah's internal balance of power likely helps to maintain its cohesion and longevity.

In summary, guardian commanders and charismatics shared with other militiamen the beliefs that Taliban brought instability and an alien ideology. They then channelled these feelings into autonomously raising militia units that would defeat Taliban and then offer a constructive future according to the town's will. Furthermore, the

structure of the leadership helped ensure that blocks would continue to be united in its goals and actions.

The goal of independence via self-sufficiency is not only showcased in the words and actions of Marjah's guardian leaders and fighters but also in centuries of historical precedent. This town's movement, in historical context, appeared one of the latest examples of a traditional value of autonomy against outside would-be oppressive actors. While the last chapter found that fighting for one's qawm was not a primary verbal narrative, the next section will look to the qawm value of self-determination as a storied and practiced centre of gravity.

#### **7.4 Self-Determination: A Centre of Gravity**

Though most guardians were self-identified nationalists and did not speak of fighting for tribalism, it was the qawm system that was an innately accepted vehicle for the arbakai's rise, structure, and efforts towards self-determination. With self-sufficiency, the qawm system was the method for locals to organize and rise. Arbakai's immediate and viral birth<sup>759</sup> occurred block-by-block like dominos.<sup>760</sup> Even as nationalism was a war cry, qawm continued to appear to be the strongest identity of those in town even well after the arbakai was stood up. Block elders continued to hold the most power and responsibility—far more than the District Governor.<sup>761</sup> Likewise, block elders became arbakai sub-commanders unless the block elder felt old or infirmed and appointed someone else from the same block. Furthermore, guardians foremost were expected to patrol and protect their own blocks. The qawm system was the method through which those in Marjah rose and fought.<sup>762</sup>

Encoded in this qawm identity, in the case of Marjah, was foremost this sense of self-determination. This central value has historical precedent. As the second chapter on the history of southern rural Afghanistan explained, qawm often fight against invading armies and suppressive central regimes. Ultimately they fight for the aim of autonomy against entities that would otherwise wish to impose laws and ways of life foreign to rural qawm.<sup>763</sup> Such an historical phenomenon holds relevance for Marjah today. It was the continued goal of self-determination for all Marjah's qawm that appeared the greatest motivation as opposed to the idea of qawm itself.<sup>764</sup>

The village's *arbakai* appear to follow a deeply engrained tradition that spans centuries. The strength and resilience of traditional Pashtun rural societal structures through Afghanistan's tumultuous history underlines the historical precedence of Marjah's *arbakai*. The *qawm* system became the phenomenon to which rural residents in southern Afghanistan often clung despite and sometimes because of outside or central government threats. At its essence, this rural system was a vehicle for locals to consistently seek their own communal goals and was not a mechanism that existed only because of tradition. Within the history of *qawm* either fighting outside actors or reuniting after times of extreme turmoil, is a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency.<sup>765</sup> Thus the Marjah *arbakai*'s overriding theme of self-determination is a contemporary manifestation of a consistent goal that span generations back.

In history, Pashtuns felt they must, whenever possible, protect themselves, their *qawm*, and their *qawm*'s way of life. This sense of self-sufficiency and self-determination allows *qawm* to often be the default identity in times of instability even when such instability comes at the hands of internal greater tribal warfare. This clan system would never lay down weapons and ammunition—even assault rifles and grenades today—willingly because most Pashtuns in rural Afghanistan count on their *qawm* foremost to defend their lives and land. The idea of disarming *qawm* is uncomfortable and even suicidal in the eyes of rural Pashtuns.<sup>766</sup> Clans have in the past killed to maintain their autonomy.

Historically, anti-oppressive-central-government and counter-outsider movements normally begin *qawm-by-qawm*<sup>767</sup> for independence—beginning locally where they resided. While lasting central governments in the past typically relied on influential tribal leadership and landowners to help collect taxes near municipalities, no government has appeared to co-opt rural *qawm* enduringly.<sup>768</sup> Even Afghan warlords who attempt to subjugate rural *qawm* systems normally fail in the face of this persistent Pashtun identity.<sup>769</sup> In short, self-determination historically has acted as centre of gravity and rallying cry for uprising.

If the historical pattern of independence amongst *qawm* was so strong, why does this phenomenon not manifest itself into uprisings against outside forces throughout Afghanistan today? In fact, self-determination is so relevant as to become a main

driver of many other contemporary movements on which there is limited data. Similar to Marjah, there is evidence that other relatively successful contemporary counter-extremist clan movements held autonomy and self-sufficiency as a means and an end. Although not part of this case study, highlighting other successful counter-violent-extremist grassroots movements in Afghanistan and Pakistan underline the still-relevant deep-seated historical value of independence as a driver.

The following anti-violent-extremist movements operated with autonomy, and their operations were not contingent on salaries, projects, or peace accords. They show the will and resolve to fight Taliban with whatever they have on hand and choose not to use their initial reaction to Taliban violence as a bargaining chip with GIRoA or the United States government to gain anything for themselves. The following movements appear also to show a self-driven resolve. Independence and independent action appears, according to the reports available, to allow the movements to flourish locally. Marjah was one manifestation of a seemingly fervent value of Pashtun qawm, that, however, is not contemporarily ubiquitous as the previous section explained of other movements that ceased over lack of funding.

- *Andar, 2012*: Reports suggest the Andar awakening may be bent on self-determination beyond its initial acrimony over Taliban actions. The uprising in the Andar District of Ghazni Province in May 2012, successfully drove out Taliban wholly from villages.<sup>770</sup> The Taliban tried again for a foothold in the same villages, but locals reportedly repelled the incursion again.<sup>771</sup> According to press reports, three months after the uprising began in Andar's village of Payendi the movement grew to 250 armed citizens with control supposedly over approximately 50 villages.<sup>772</sup>

These anti-Taliban rebels armed themselves with their own personal weapons and claimed no outside or government support—no weapons and no money come from the government or Coalition Forces, according to the fighters. They have not claimed alliance with U.S. elements, and uprising members have openly denied supposed reports of GIRoA support.<sup>773</sup> Rumours, however, abound that Hikmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami<sup>774</sup> militia group and GIRoA security chief Asadullah Khalid (originally from Ghazni) have provided some forms of personal support to elements of the uprising. As well former Ghazni governor turned national minister of tribal affairs has claimed some role as a leader within the movement—though citizen fighters appear wary over his ties to GIRoA and past perceived corruption.<sup>775</sup> Some reports state that Khalid has even given hundreds of thousands of dollars just to select friends who may be commanders in the movement though Khalid himself denies these rumours.<sup>776</sup> To what levels this support occurs, how much this support allows the uprising



to be autonomous vice subjugated to an outside influence, and how much non-natives want to seem apart of a successful movement in speeches alone is unclear.<sup>777</sup> Nonetheless, in their actions, the Andar awakening seems to have unfolded with autonomy and resolve.

- *Spin Boldak, 2006:* Colonel Abdul Raziq (as of March 2013 he held the rank of General and operated as Kandahar Provincial Chief of Police) led a small unit of his fellow tribesmen against Taliban elements. Like Marjah, the Spin Boldak movement continued unfazed by lack of direct outside support. Tenacious offensive operations defined the character and propaganda of the movement. Colonel Abdul Raziq's tribal militia from the Adozai clan of the Achakzai tribe tenaciously killed Taliban leaders and IED cells. His militia—in 2006 numbering from 400 to 1,700 at various periods—conducted major incursions far outside tribal boundaries. His exploits included disparate regions such as Arghandab, Maiwand, Zangabad, and Bandi Taimoor—areas in southern Afghanistan far from his home village.<sup>778</sup>

Their operations were so aggressive and self-sufficient that self-defence also became a powerful message. Raziq had supposedly killed so many Taliban that taking the fight to the Taliban as brutally and swiftly as possible may have been Raziq's only defence. He likely became a priority target for Taliban, and Raziq may have felt that continuation of operations may have been his road to survival.<sup>779</sup>

Raziq sought funding by any means necessary, never wanting to be beholden to any outside entity, and exploited his earlier ties to border checkpoint guards to take money and drugs. Raziq critics claim he was filling only his personal coffers. However he continued the fight against the Taliban and still today remains the most renowned single anti-Taliban fighter as the Provincial Chief of Police in the province of Kandahar.<sup>780</sup> How much his movement is a manifestation of Pashtun qawm independence from Taliban influence vice a vendetta-ridden rise of a cult of personality is unclear. What is clear, however, is that at its inception, Raziq's followers showed a drive towards independence through self-sufficiency.

- *Dir, Pakistan, 2009:* The anti-Taliban leaders and fighters continued the fight and did not appear to pause to gain leverage for government money. Security became such a paramount issue that heated debates ensued on whether to and, if so, how much to ask for outside military support. The anti-militant fighters were, in 2009, split between how much government military intervention would be wise. Some felt that seemingly callous indiscriminate government bombing would mean civilian deaths and a population's exodus. Others felt that strong Pakistani military operations might be necessary to completely destroy Taliban remnants in the area—an all-out-war would be the only way to keep villagers safe.<sup>781</sup> Both sides of the argument appear wary of government involvement and the side effects of clumsy military support. But each sect seemed keen on increasing overall security and only allowing outside support and intervention solely in the name of ridding Taliban from their area.

In conclusion, autonomy, both as a goal and as a means by which to achieve that end, was the overriding theme with historical practice for those successfully fighting Taliban. While regional GIRoA officials and Afghanistan federal laws nurtured this independence, the Taliban proved they did not and would not allow Marjah to govern and secure itself independently with a view to continue security and education. It is conceivable that this militia may have revolted or protested government or outside military units had these alien actors elected not to allow the volunteers to operate independently towards a goal of autonomy. But it was, instead, the Taliban that locals saw as a threat to independence. It is not surprising, then, that other relatively long-lived uprisings against Taliban violent extremists in Pakistan and Afghanistan also sought self-determination.

Despite that self-determination seemed a storied centre of gravity in Marjah, ISAF's position in southern Helmand, prior to the arabakai's rise, had the potential to stifle the militia's relative freedom to act and seek their own aims.<sup>782</sup> Although legally arabakai had protections and authorities under the modern Afghanistan constitution, the heavy presence of ISAF troops along with military doctrine that barely accounted for self-driven militias had the potential to retard drives for self-governance. That the arabakai could have the ability to seek self-determination was not a fiat accompli.

## **7.5 Military Troops Strengthen Self-Determination**

At first look, analysts could doubt the veracity of self-determination due to heavy ISAF presence; DSF doctrine, which calls for direct action by ISAF; NATO focus on formal government at the expense of interaction with informal governance; VSO-type methodologies, which require direct recruitment by ISAF troops to build artificial civilian militias; and ISAF commanders placing this doctrine and mindset on the village of Marjah as a main effort and mainstay of military and economic development strategy. Although arabakai are legally protected phenomena within the Afghan laws, a student of the military surge and outside-funded projects in the millions of U.S. dollars could also logically assess that the actions of the local anti-Taliban civilian efforts were just extra guns in a tightly planned campaign to overwhelm Taliban in Marjah with conventional ISAF Army and Marine troops. However, Marjah's case was exceptional.

The foreign troops' tactics on the ground in and near Marjah assured that the actions and words of Marjah's militia were not part of some ISAF information campaign but instead truly represented beliefs of the locals. Furthermore, the U.S. and allied forces and civilian counterparts' approach, which were minimalist with regards to this *arbakai*, revealed that the local civilian fighters' actions indeed required self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

The U.S. Marines and their other NATO military and civilian partners effectively identified and enabled a societal resiliency in lieu of a more direct approach. Instead of following the literal approaches of the District Stability Framework and Village Stability Operations doctrine that called for direct U.S. presence, activities, development projects, and security, the local Soldier and Marines chose to focus on empowering this resilient entity with a minimalist approach. The view was that if resilient actors, whose goals were in consonance with the goals of ISAF and the United States and her partners in Afghanistan, were already showing signs of success it would behoove a light approach—a strategy to slightly empower a known anti-Taliban force to succeed. This was a far cry from directly recruiting a militia to do ISAF's bidding. It was, instead, an acknowledgement of a resilient and effective grassroots effort that has had a history of being the most consistent and robust entity against outside actors. Fortunately for ISAF and GIRoA, alien actors were the Taliban in the eyes of Marjahns as ISAF and GIRoA were enabling Marjah's self-determination.

Initial ample security for qawm leaders to organize took several months during the 2010 spring offensive with help from intervention from the highest-ranking officer in Afghanistan. After 90 days, General McChrystal's frustration grew. The battalion commander in Marjah asked for patience to conduct concerted holistic counterinsurgency. Senior NATO civilian advisor in Afghanistan Mark Sedwill agreed that patience and a more discreet presence was necessary but also understood McChrystal's frustration over high international expectations. The ISAF commander felt that United States government's patience was ticking. McChrystal famously called the situation in Marjah his "bleeding ulcer,"<sup>783</sup> because the operation there had taken resources, troops, and money without immediate impact.

Commander of coalition forces for southern Afghanistan British Major General Nick Carter pushed back and declaratively stated that no new forces were needed in Marjah.<sup>784</sup> To this McChrystal, before staff, press, and subordinate commanders said that Carter felt that way because “it’s your plan.”<sup>785</sup> From this conversation ISAF sent a second Marine battalion into Marjah with a view to hasten security. These two units, Second Battalion of the Sixth Marine Regiment and Third Battalion of the Ninth Marine Regiment, effectively brought the requisite security bubble for locals to potentially govern as they once did through traditional qawm.<sup>786</sup> However international attention, a commander’s intent to use heavy and direct force, and stability operations doctrine was a potential recipe to ignore geographically based clan systems or even ignite antipathy from the block-qawm system of Marjah.

Doctrine, between 2007 and 2011, called for direct stability operations in which U.S. and Coalition Forces would physically conduct or pay for projects to mitigate sources of instability.<sup>787</sup> The doctrine held no room to simply empower local indigenous resilient actors with anti-violent-extremist sentiment<sup>788</sup> This doctrine—ISAF mandated throughout Afghanistan—the District Stability Framework and its subsequent manifestations called for U.S. troops to directly mitigate systemic causes of instability instead of allowing clans to stabilize and secure themselves by their own volition, vision, tradition, and timeline.<sup>789</sup>

In addition to the required stability operations framework, there was also the precedent of the Village Stability Operations methodology that called for direct recruitment of tribesmen as artificial, foreign-recruited auxiliary police units. In 2010 Regimental Combat Team-1 Commanding Officer—who would later respect the natural arbakai movement—attended a joint Center for Strategic and International Studies and RAND meeting in which academics in no uncertain terms suggested that Local Defence Forces were the only way to reach a suggested 40:1 security force to civilian ratio.<sup>790</sup> He also received briefings on the Village Stability Operations program in with the Special Forces focused on direct recruitment.<sup>791</sup> The concern was numbers to thicken counterinsurgency efforts. The recommendations never called for allowing natural rural resiliencies to operate on their own accord in their own manner with minimal U.S. involvement.

ISAF commanders in Kabul, even after Marines had established initial security, planned a heavy direct approach into Helmand—and then Marjah specifically—to defeat the Taliban. This approach had the potential to ignore centuries of proven rural resilience of qawm. Doctrine and a commander's intent to use overwhelming western forces had the potential to either sideline or suppress the natural indigenous qawm that had in the past had the tendency to rebel against all outside destabilizing powers. U.S. policy ignored the phenomenon that tribes and villages, no matter how displaced and how war torn, could be empowered to defeat the Taliban. Embedded in the U.S. trajectory of heavy and direct operations was inevitable failure if Marjah's qawm viewed international forces as an outside threat to their way of life. The U.S. heavy approach could potentially have mired U.S. troops into a drawn-out battle against not only the Taliban but also the most enduring Afghan rural system: the qawm and their *arbakai*. The question was not one of whether the U.S. policy could succeed as much as how operators would act on the ground despite inappropriate counterinsurgency strategy.

The U.S. troops on the ground in and around Marjah had a unique advantage in Afghanistan—an angle that would allow them to ignore doctrine and any Kabul NATO and ISAF order to employ a heavy presence in Marjah. U.S. Marines in Helmand were the only units in Afghanistan to command completely their own terrain and airspace. They were also the only who were not under the direct command of the supreme coalition commander based in Kabul. Instead, they answered to a U.S. Central Command Marine Corps Lieutenant General.<sup>792</sup> Such relative independence may have helped the Marine units in and around Marjah to break doctrine and four-star-in-Kabul commander's intent by allowing the qawm to operate with independence and impunity once Marjah was initially secure enough for the *arbakai* to rise.

Also, the officers on the ground did not ask for permission from Kabul or from Division command. A low profile and light approach was only sanctioned with regimental staff. When rumours and then reports of the Marines' approach reached division levels of command, the Afghans were able to show success in operations, allowing the Marines to continue this non-doctrinal minimalist approach.<sup>793</sup> Marine

advisors on the ground in and around Marjah elected a minimalist approach, waited for proof of effect on improvements in stability and security, and then reported this success. At that point, commanders at the division and then through the four-star level would have been hard pressed to stop a tradecraft that appeared to meet the commander's end state of stability and local repulsion of Taliban presence, incursion, and influence.

This U.S. light approach continued through 2012 and then through the transition in 2013—although transition initiatives really began as early as 2010 since NATO forces allowed *arbakai* to operate on their own. The American advisors chose a low presence and found that the lower the presence, the better the security forces in Marjah—to include the *arbakai* who conducted the day-to-day internal security—could independently improve themselves and succeed over the Taliban. Marine advisors found that security would depend on Marines when there was a large American presence. On the other hand, the modest presence and few advisors not only gave locals an opportunity to know how to operate without Marine presence.<sup>794</sup>

As 2012 Afghan Security Advisor in Marjah U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Phil Treglia stated, “[i]f you put 19 [U.S.] Marines in one area that meant there are 19 [U.S.] Marines working to get things done. And that means there are 19 [Afghans] who aren’t doing their job.”<sup>795</sup> He and other advisers invested in a constructive course of action in which Afghans appeared to operate best in the lead conducting their work in their own way.<sup>796</sup> U.S. officers consciously chose this approach to allow locals to conduct security and stabilization on their own well before transition. The idea was that locals would be on their own soon anyhow so it behoved outside security forces to give them independence as immediately as possible. Only in this way can locals gain confidence in themselves and practice the types of self-driven operations they would have to conduct post-NATO drawdown and withdrawal.<sup>797</sup> ISAF advisors felt it vital that such resilient Afghan actors gain confidence in themselves; they should be able to trust themselves and rely upon themselves.<sup>798</sup> ISAF mentors and advisors in Marjah saw themselves as gentle persuaders or intellectual helpers—allowing locals to fail, learn, and strengthen on their own.<sup>799</sup> Additionally, they noted that the locals were in the best position to secure and

stabilize their own blocks because they know the people, the terrain, and the patterns of the society.<sup>800</sup>

The local U.S. conventional Marine commands eventually used programmatic money and short training sessions to further empower the *arbakai*. However, these foreign troops created nothing. As the commander for 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion 6<sup>th</sup> Marine regiment in southern Marjah stated on 3 July 2011, the tribes had militias before as a natural security arm of *qawm*. ISAF recognizing *arbakai* with modest salaries and basic tactical training was just a slight elevation of what was already there. He surmised that after programmatic funding, the *arbakai* and *qawm* structures would continue as they had before. Marjah successfully used locals who already enjoyed influence, into a hands-off minimalist Village Stability Operations-like program.<sup>801</sup> Any funding and training was simply a recognition and slight empowerment of what already had existed naturally. However, according to two regimental commanders commanding operations in Marjah, two battalion commanders commanding operations in Marjah, and interviews of locals, the titles and anorexic training do not substantially change the efficacy, disposition, strength, motive, or identity of the militia.

Stability operators focused on strengthening resilience against current and future instability—a resiliency in this case being “the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress” and “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”<sup>802</sup> To some degree ISAF operators went beyond enabling resilience and likely were identifying anti-fragility<sup>803</sup>—referring to similar entities that not only have the capability to withstand change and misfortune but also actually become stronger through adversity.

However, stability operators were looking for a specific type of resiliency or anti-fragility. Specifically, operators were attempting to identify and leverage a kind of resilience that would lead to a specific type of stability that is defined by the U.S. and partner nations’ end state with regards to violent extremism. These particular resilient entities specifically counter violent extremism and stabilize their communities to disallow future violent extremist influence, presence, and incursion. According to the campaign plan, “stable enough” means specifically incapacitating violent extremists and building impermissible environments to future violent extremists.<sup>804</sup> Their

enduring absence becomes “stable enough” within the framework of the formal United States’ campaign goals.

Therefore the troops on the ground in southern Helmand were identifying and enabling *a resilient person or network that strived for stability through increasing support for governance, lessening support for insurgency, and strengthening societal capacity with a particular view to permanently undermine violent extremist presence, incursion, and influence*. What this translated into on the ground was local actors using indigenous sustainable solutions on a self-regulated timeline—quietly empowering local immune systems against the conditions that allow NATO’s enemies safe haven and growth. Effectively, ISAF commands in southern Helmand identified and enabled a militia that:<sup>805</sup>

- Actively counters, undermines, or lessens support and growth of violent extremist groups and supporting criminal organizations and cells.
- Offers or supports alternatives to viable violent extremist programs.
- Increases support for government and/or locally recognized governance institutions and leaders such as town councils, block elders, and other traditional governance entities, who show attributes of also being resiliencies.
- Strengthens societal capacity and/or cohesion—the ability of a community to address its own sources of instability such as security for education.
- Does not show characteristics of supporting or contributing to zero-sum power games because the block system suppressed one elder gaining unwanted village-wide power.
- Displays determined and sustained motivation through narratives and action to undermine support for insurgents, increase support for governance, and strengthen societal capacity.
- Displays self-motivation that is not for sale by violent extremists.
- Actively supports or leads efforts to kinetically cause sustained continuous defeat of violent extremist cells.

In the case of Marjah, tactics to leverage the *arbakai* specifically included a plethora of minimalist activities. From doing nothing to ensuring initial ample security for block elders to meet at the militia’s inception, the following is a short summary of distinct modest approaches employed:<sup>806</sup>

- Avoided intervention or communication but instead simply acknowledge and keep distance. In many cases “identifying and reporting” on resiliencies was a constructive course of action assuming these consonant bodies are able to conduct their business as usual.



- Created a security bubble to allow resilient actors freedom of movement and freedom to plan, collaborate, and grow in strength. To even meet and organize, resilient bodies required some security space from violent extremists, because these societal lynchpins willing to stand up against insurgents may face the threat of assassination, execution, and torture.
- At first, the U.S. troops also had a quick reaction force at the ready to surge in an area if threats build. Beyond just a security bubble, the arbakai leaders may have required confidence that competent, powerful, and quick reaction units are available if violent extremists were to overwhelm them, kinetically and suddenly. If such resilient actors do not have the hardware, ammunition, and knowledge to at least defend themselves against an attack, they may be less likely to sign up for certain death from reprisal without a sense of security.
- Trained resiliencies on stability operations best practices such as finding and mitigating those sources of instability that may allow insurgency to gain new traction in the given area of operations. Specifically DSF was one class that was provided at the District Centre.
- Negotiated with district and provincial governments to appoint a consonant body to formal or informal community or government positions if this resilient actor is willing and believes it could expand his or her reach. In Marjah the block elders comprised a GIROA and ISAF-sanctioned Community Assembly.
- The security enabled meetings with other resiliencies to foster networking. ISAF allowed liaison with Afghan-led radio stations and other media outlets and provided logistics for religious training and/or meetings with religious leaders.
- Allowed local resilient actors to conduct their own messaging—directly to international press and to studies such as this one.

The mindset of foreign stabilization practitioners in Marjah can be described as the ability to see different types of stabilizing powerbrokers that already exist and leverage these indigenous bodies to meet the stated tactical, operational, and grand strategic objectives. The objective would be ideally to strengthen these community lynchpins that already strive to set conditions antithetical to both insurgency and the unstable climate that may enable insurgency. Titles for this framework could include “stability operations by proxy,” “light footprint counterinsurgency,” “operational minimalism,” or “resiliency appreciation.” But “consonance” is most appropriate because its primary meaning of “harmony or agreement among components”<sup>807</sup> suggests U.S. or other outside entities acting in concert with those personalities and organizations that are already naturally affecting the mission’s end state.

In addition to the local ISAF units in Marjah, provincial and district GIROA also acknowledged this arbakai as an independent, self-motivated phenomenon. GIROA publically stated that the Marjah arbakai was a self-initiated phenomenon—not an

artificial GIRoA and ISAF initiative. The Helmand governor's office claimed that the tribesmen were not a government-initiated *arbakai* but instead a completely grassroots spontaneous movement sparked on the heels of Taliban suppression. The office claimed the locals were viscerally "fed up" with violent extremist crimes against humanity.<sup>808</sup> Even the 2011 Helmand governor spokesman Dawoud Ahmadi emphatically stated that the village security force was unconnected to government or would ever be<sup>809</sup> even though the *arbakai* would eventually receive some funding and training from international forces.

While the Taliban were unwelcome, those outside entities, to include NATO units and the presidentially appointed district governor, appeared to be in Marjah as welcome guests by the *arbakai* and militia commanders. This sense of hospitality<sup>810</sup> in general is not just a congenial phenomenon but plays into a Pashtun tradition of *nanawatia*<sup>811</sup> or offer of physical refuge. Although Marjahns would unlikely wish to house outside Afghans and non-Afghans in their personal compound, ISAF and GIRoA representatives were welcome in the village in general. The Taliban, when they first came to Marjah in the 1990s, sought safe haven in Marjah compounds. However after Taliban tried to upend the village's systems of governance and security, they were welcome no more.<sup>812</sup>

In summary, in contrast to the surge on Marjah and in the face of doctrinal U.S. military strategies that called for U.S. forces to maintain heavy presence and daily oversight over the *arbakai*, the local U.S. tactical units in the village quickly elected for a minimalist approach protecting the *arbakai*'s goals of autonomy. U.S. Marine Corps commanders in Marjah stated publicly that they were identifying and allowing societal structures and resiliencies that already existed to operate with autonomy.<sup>813</sup> Effectively ISAF units located in and around Marjah were tapping into a resiliency that has historically proven a formidable force from unwelcome outsiders; they nurtured the autonomy and self-reliance that the *arbakai* sought. The local ISAF commanders analyzed the local civilian terrain<sup>814</sup> and improvised to meet their mission.<sup>815</sup>

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The foreign security forces, against precedent, chose to enable instead of stifle drives for independence of outside control. This allowed this study to uncover that Marjah militia's self-determination was an underlining motivation and goal. The fighters' interviews, the actions and words of the arbakai block commanders, and the willingness of guardians to fight and die without financial incentive reveal not only self-reliance but also a move towards autonomy. Self-determination was not an abstract societal aim but instead a viable way to live and operate each day for the arbakai.

Autonomy was not only a major theme in and of itself, but it also helped define the other motivations of this counter-violent-extremist grassroots movement. As guardians sought stability and a future of education against a formidable opposing alien ideology, self-determination coloured their words and actions. Security and education were according to their own design and vision for which they fought autonomously. Although geographic clan-ism was not an explicit driver of the fighters, it was the nature of the qawm—to seek autonomy without outside help—that revealed itself the fundamental inspiration for the subject of this case study.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this case study of a single counter-violent-extremist movement found self-determination as the central theme of the motivations, actions, and goals of Marjah's militiamen. The *arbakai* prided itself in its self-reliance and independent mindset.<sup>816</sup> Militiamen felt they and they alone would have to defeat violent extremism, refusing to rely only on foreign or national formal security forces. Autonomy—underlining both oral narratives and the independent nature by which they fought and suffered—appeared the centre of gravity and inundated their responses to the interviews, their idealistic and perhaps exaggerated verbal goals, and their determined spirit.

This chapter will now, in summary, answer the initial research questions on what conditions allowed the *arbakai* to operate and succeed, and what outside military and government actions enabled such a grassroots movement to thrive and seek independence. For this last question, it should be noted, that one cannot study the Marjah case in a vacuum especially as the militia existed and acted in close proximity to arguably one of the most powerful military forces in the world that chose to focus on Marjah as a once main effort of the Afghanistan campaign. Then, the chapter will address its impact on counterinsurgency literature with regards to theory, policy, and practice. Finally, it will provide an outlook on future comparative studies of other grassroots counter-violent-extremist movements and where this case study may lie within potential forthcoming scholarship.

#### **8.1 Drivers and Conditions of Marjah's Militia**

What were the initial conditions—the security, economy, previous interactions with violent extremists, and geography—for a potentially successful grassroots kinetic movement? For this particular case study, an initial ISAF security bubble was necessary. To even meet, organize, and plan, the *arbakai* and block elders required some security space<sup>817</sup> without the immediate threat of violent extremists.<sup>818</sup> Assassinations, executions, and torture face any tribal or village leader considering undermining violent extremists.<sup>819</sup> Potential uprisings also required confidence that

competent, powerful, and swift quick reaction units would be available if violent extremists were to overwhelm them suddenly.<sup>820</sup> Although the militia, in a matter of months from its birth, appeared to be the most reliable, consistent, and effective security unit in the village proper, an initial security bubble from outside security forces was necessary for the militia to begin.

Economically, the semi-arable land allowed the locals to farm, once security was in order so they were not necessarily reliant on millions of U.S. dollars of ISAF development projects or the Taliban poppy trade in order to put food on the table.<sup>821</sup> In the deserts surrounding Marjah, where locals claim that poppy is the only viable crop given the dry soil,<sup>822</sup> the Taliban give out poppy seeds and demand yields from the harvest. When growers fail to provide enough poppies, farmers go into debt. Taliban may also defend poppy fields whose owners could otherwise not fend off or pay off government-led poppy eradication.<sup>823</sup> Being economically dependent on the insurgency would likely make a populace wary of biting the hand that feeds by warring with violent extremists.<sup>824</sup> On the otherhand, in Marjah, the locals continued nutritious subsistence farming once there was ample stability for civilians to tend to their fields along the secondary canals inside the village. Low-technology traditional subsistence farming<sup>825</sup> allowed fighters and their families to sustain anti-Taliban operations without relying on outside subsidies or Taliban help.

Regarding past interactions with violent extremists, the locals received a taste of arguably some of the most violent Taliban suppression of citizens in Afghanistan. Taliban leaders ranged from would-be drug lords, who previously turned the village into an opium market and used the locals as unwilling servants for poppy growth and the drug trade;<sup>826</sup> hardcore adherents to Taliban's quasi-Deobandi faith that held no room for Marjah's tribalism and mysticism;<sup>827</sup> those that received and acted on orders from the top Quetta leadership as Marjah became a main effort<sup>828</sup> not only for ISAF but also for the Taliban;<sup>829</sup> and insurgent commanders, who saw themselves as closer to al-Qa`ida in nature willing to torture and execute civilians seemingly without restraint.<sup>830</sup> In short, such violence from a perceived alien entity and foreign ideology flamed local hatred of the militiamen and appeared to deepen their commitment to defeat violent extremists. Most importantly to the guardians, though, was that the Taliban were obstacles to local political autonomy and independent action. The mere

speed of the militia's rise and relative success over the Taliban followed quickly by farming, qawm governance operating as they had before the Taliban, local healthcare, and education<sup>831</sup>—even when it meant locals opening private homes up to teach children when schools were not yet built<sup>832</sup>—revealed local resolve to be autonomous and act according to own set of goals.

The unique geography of Marjah created clear neighborhoods by which the *arbakai* could rely to build sub-militia units.<sup>833</sup> Furthermore, it allowed the civilian fighters attainable missions amidst perhaps exaggerated and idealistic claims of securing Afghanistan for a future free of Taliban and a destiny that allowed nationwide education to better young lives and build intellectual resilience against insurgent influence. While fighters, during the interviews, spoke of ridding the country of Taliban to allow security and education, they were able to funnel such grand aspirations into realistic chores: helping their smaller block units secure their own areas to allow for schools and independence. Furthermore, the balance of power amongst the blocks writ large may enable longevity as the overall system discourages warlords or particular block elders to gain traditionally unwarranted power.

The final condition that allowed this movement to excel was a mindset of independent action that allowed the movement to thrive. In the case of Marjah, there were a myriad of distinct motivations to include a goal of security and education while ridding the area of an alien force in the name of the nation. However, each idea hinged on independently spirited action as a means and relative autonomy as an end. This motivation and aim appeared to be a central source of strength for the uprising—providing a core forte that compelled civilian guards to stay at their post, patrol, and kill Taliban even as they were targets of the insurgency's highest leaders<sup>834</sup> with limited resources and sometimes no income.<sup>835</sup> Enabling their ambitions for independence, national laws, provincial Afghan government representatives, and outside military operations enabled and protected the objectives and tactics of this civilian militia.

## 8.2 Foreign Military Actions that Enabled Independence

Furthermore what are the conditions, mindset, and strategy of outside military forces—both the Coalition Forces and the Afghan formal security services—to help such a movement to be able to sprout in the first place? Because grassroots movements and their motivations did not stand amidst an empty canvas, this study is also a story of the tradecraft of the foreign military. The new framework that those units in Marjah elected to employ both minimized destabilizing side effects and guaranteed that local guardians would speak and perform according to their own aims. It allowed and nurtured the self-reliance locals used and independence the *arbakai* sought.

NATO military units in other areas of Afghanistan normally followed the doctrine of Village Stability Operations<sup>836</sup> and the District Stability Framework<sup>837</sup> that called not only for presence and activities by outside actors but also promoted the notion that outside actors must recruit, oversee, and guide the actions of local militias and activities.<sup>838</sup> Doctrine still today holds that outside military forces along with civilian diplomatic and development partners should spend money and mitigate sources of instability directly to bring about security and stability.<sup>839</sup> However, the case of Marjah stands out in stark contrast as one in which the opposite was done—outside forces nurtured independence and allowed a natural movement to flourish.<sup>840</sup> The findings of this study thus point to the potential upside of a counterinsurgency approach in which outside forces simply allow or empower local initiative to stabilize areas vice direct and heavy intervention.

Operational,<sup>841</sup> historical,<sup>842</sup> and legal<sup>843</sup> precedent suggests leveraging community resiliencies, in this case, was an efficient, effective, and direct way to reach campaign goals. The strategy strives to attain consonance with indigenous stabilizing forces. The tactic in Marjah ensured a local understanding of stability, minimized potential destabilizing secondary effects of heavy outside presence and money, and promoted transition. In other words, it was in ISAF's best interest, in this case, to have allowed Marjah's militia to seek its own goals of autonomy with independent resolve.

Concerning the challenge of understanding how locals interpret stability—since this definition would theoretically be the goal of doctrinal stability operations—the U.S. Marines were able to simply empower local resilient actors to define and seek their own goals, whatever they might be. Instead of trying to uncover a myriad of local perspectives and directly attempting to reach this end with a large military and civilian force, the local NATO units simply enabled the militia to act on its own.<sup>844</sup>

In the same vein as overcoming the conundrum of defining local stability by simply enabling locals to build their own capacity, this tactically minimalist approach allowed potentially effective information operations—the coordination of public affairs messaging, psychological operations, and the development, dissemination, and reception of information.<sup>845</sup> The locals, themselves, can better employ master narratives because they understand the locally deep-seated ideologies, belief systems, history, and language as no outsider can. Only locals are fluent in the visceral and logical, rational and irrational, personalized and ubiquitous messages. And only at the local level, amongst trusted colleagues, friends, relatives, and neighbors will person-to-person transmission of narratives take on intensity, emotion, and color. Through trust, recognized monuments and temples, visual motifs, and repetition will oral narratives naturally travel and strengthen. Locals are the experts at local messaging.<sup>846</sup>

Oral narratives may reflect the identity of a community in such a way that NATO information operations may be wise to leverage or amplify local stories instead of creating new messages. Each narrative is grounded in history, expressing a group's identity, accomplishments, challenges, ambitions, and desires. And through such narratives, communities can recognize their identity amidst outsiders and neighboring communities. During developing events—such as regional warfare, foreign incursion, and environmental disasters for example—narratives allow a community to gauge meaning and understanding. Narratives emerge without necessarily conscious design as communities continue to develop and preserve identity, sometimes inoculating societies from outside ideas and ideologies.<sup>847</sup> Thus a minimalist approach that only enables or allows natural *arbakai* verbal statements to spread naturally may be optimal for a place like Marjah, where locals' goals jibe with the Coalition Force-led counterinsurgency.



This mindset of finding and empowering resilient bodies cuts across traditional military and civil service lines of operation. Most United States and civilian units in Afghanistan adhere to at least three lines of operation: security, development, and governance.<sup>848</sup> The challenge arrives when military units allocate money, personnel, and time evenly or with some uninformed artificial allocation across lines of operation that may not be appropriate for the environment. By focusing on resilient bodies, commanders could better prioritize lines of operation to meet the mission end state. Instead of a unit spending about a third of its effort on each aforementioned standard line of operation, it can prioritize these lines of effort around specific actions to identify and promote Marjah arbakai, who play a role in security directly and in governance and development indirectly by maintaining ample stability for elders to govern, locals to farm, and young persons to attend school.

Additionally, by minimizing operations, presence, and even interaction with the arbakai, the NATO units on the ground in and around Marjah could minimize destabilizing effects. In other areas of Afghanistan the foreign forces often unwittingly exacerbated instability. The paradox of stability operations is that they can have destabilizing side effects when foreign entities are the protagonists. Practitioners may be exacerbating the very thing they are attempting to alleviate.<sup>849</sup> If stability is the “normal” functioning of governance, level of violence, and adherence to laws as seen through the eyes of any given Afghan,<sup>850</sup> then even the existence of outside actors may bring about change that may slow return to normalcy.

The very presence of foreign security forces and foreign aid organizations—even those claiming to conduct stabilization activities—can have destabilizing effects.<sup>851</sup> U.S. forces can bring insecurity<sup>852</sup> when those units become violent extremist targets and civilians are caught in the crossfire—both literally and with regards to allegiances. Also, there is some evidence that foreign military presence can bolster insurgencies’ rhetoric and perhaps strengthen violent extremist recruitment.<sup>853</sup> The presence of foreign security services play into the modern violent extremist propaganda efforts that the West is at war with Islam and ultimately attempting to occupy Muslim-majority lands.<sup>854</sup>

Regarding militia salaries and equipment, the commands on the ground elected a modest approach—so laissez-faire that the *arbakai* went sometime months without any pay despite commands having tens of millions of dollars to spend on security and projects. Such an approach may have been wise, as more money may have caused instability.<sup>855</sup> Even when projects are aimed at attempting to mitigate analyzed sources of instability, those projects can add to overall instability and insecurity.<sup>856</sup> In the case of the 2001-2014 war in Afghanistan, the NATO spending and projects in Afghanistan are the primary source of funding for violent extremists, to include the Afghan Taliban and local *al-Qa`ida*. Siphoning off and “taxing” military and aid projects eclipses violent extremists’ money from poppy, morphine, opium, and heroin development and smuggling and all other criminal efforts combined.<sup>857</sup> The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction has underlined a number of unclassified cases when money spent on any project has eventually gone into the hand of insurgents—in the case of Marjah on the outskirts of the village<sup>858</sup>--not to mention that more money into the village could have exacerbated perceptions of corruption.<sup>859</sup> The relatively hands-off approach of Marines ensured minimum destabilizing effects of money.

Perhaps most important to the international security forces was that focus on enabling locals allowed effective transition. In fact, empowering Marjah’s guardians was not a tactic with a view towards transition—when a central government or outside force wishes to drawdown or withdraw and leave locals with the responsibility of their own stability and security—it is, instead, the very practice of transition itself. It is the art of allowing locals to solve village problems on their own timeline via indigenous means.<sup>860</sup> The minimalist tactics allowed the *arbakai* to fail, solve problems, and strengthen their community in their own way with their own will. Such efforts can be described as sustainable because the fighters were more likely to feel invested ownership of their operations and any owned facilities or equipment.

Well past a given transition date, it may be the existing deeply burrowed societal resilient bodies that outlast the Taliban. Some counterinsurgency analysts claim that the Taliban and similar regional violent extremist organizations have the patience to outlast Coalition Force presence.<sup>861</sup> But the Taliban may unlikely outlast an

arbakai's presence such as Marjah's. Dedicated societal linchpins may meet or even undermine Taliban's willingness to endure.<sup>862</sup>

### 8.3 Policy Implications

With regards to counterinsurgency literature, this case challenges the assumptions and arguments of those authors who recommend large-scale counterinsurgency operations. For example, Mark Weiner<sup>863</sup> and John Nagl's<sup>864</sup> recommendations and intonations to view tribalism as potentially destabilizing society and weakening a central government are not supported by this case study. Marjah's arbakai directly helped the town's stability<sup>865</sup> and strengthened the central government in that it worked within legal parameters<sup>866</sup> and helped to fight an enemy of the state. Additionally, those experts such as David Galula,<sup>867</sup> who call for a heavy "top-down" government-centred tactics in counterinsurgency, would not be able to look to Marjah to support their arguments.

This case, instead, pushes the research of those experts who underline the advantages of low-foot-print tactics relying on local resiliencies to its logical extreme of simply allowing or empowering some indigenous movements to flourish—to act as an immune system against violent extremism. This study provides one actualized example of Anthony Cordesman,<sup>868</sup> Robert Pape,<sup>869</sup> and Andrew Wilder's<sup>870</sup> theories and recommendations of the importance of low-impact counterinsurgency. The case study supports their conclusions in an extreme way: the ISAF troops on the ground worked with the militia minimally and only allowed and leveraged them to violently, enduringly, and passionately defeat the local insurrection. Policy-wise, the story and analysis of Marjah's arbakai underline the same lasting resilience of Pashtun systems of governance—even after despotic rulers of the distant past—that Thomas Barfield,<sup>871</sup> Arturo Munoz,<sup>872</sup> and Khan Idris<sup>873</sup> have described. It is a modern materialization of a historical phenomenon in an extreme way: the traditional columns of Pashtun life found roots not only in an artificial town just over half a century old but also resurged after over three decades of warfare and violently instituted anti-tribal policies.

It must be caveated, however, and emphasized again, that this is an analysis of Marjah only. As the literature review in the first chapter discussed, there is evidence that contemporary viable Pashtun resilience systems are not ubiquitous. Following over three decades of Russian, warlord, and then NATO intervention, many areas do not have what Afghan experts Scott Mann<sup>874</sup> and David Phillips<sup>875</sup> deem normal rural governance and security mechanisms, even if these systems will eventually resurge. Stories abound of villages in which farmers do not have even the most basic knowledge of farming that their dead or fled fathers and grandfathers held.<sup>876</sup> Special Forces and U.S. conventional troops' unclassified after action reports claim that institutional tribal knowledge is so lost that, in some cases, tribal farmers kill earth worms fearing these creatures hurt crops (earth worms are actually often helpful to crops, as even the most inexperienced farmer around the world are taught well). The assertion begs the question: should governments combating violent extremists consider policies that centre on just leveraging militias and other resilient entities? No. Clearly such a one-size-fits all policy would fail in areas where clan leadership and traditions have been degraded and not yet resurged.

Instead, this study points to the significance of tradecraft—operational and tactical tools to allow the military, diplomatic corps, and development services to meet an end state within legal and strategic parameters—over one singular policy or approach. In the case of countering violent extremists, a situation in which many disparate radical cells embed in dissimilar tribes and villages throughout the world, it may be logical that policy emphasize tradecraft and not a singular “top-down” “solution” for all situations. Of course, such a notion of emphasizing tradecraft that could call for vastly different strategies from one area of operations to another, would be most applicable for areas like Afghanistan in which villages, municipalities, geography, and tribes are sometimes so dissimilar as to make the country seem an area of many nations.

Another policy implication for Marjah is the possibility of supporting a militia that could lead to future civil war, federal government degradation, and long-term instability. Those against supporting tribal militias in Afghanistan point to the civil war of the 1990s to illustrate their fears for a future of chaotic clan warfare. However, as the second chapter in this study reveals, the factions that defined those pre-Taliban

days comprised not defensively natured traditional *arbakai* but instead former mujahedin warlords and their mullahs, who defied regular Pashtun ways of life. Marjah's militia, as with other modern *jirga*-instigated security forces, does not vie for power outside the village and would likely dissipate once enduring security is ensured. In fact, Pashtuns tribal elders rarely become enduring warlords as this egalitarian society does not bestow special powers to its leaders. Instead clan chiefs are first among equals and rise and fall on their usefulness to members. It is unlikely that tribesmen would continue to support an elder who brought his clan unnecessary widespread warfare, death, and time away from farming. The same cannot be said for the false Western-recruited paramilitary militias from ISAF programs that create new mini-armies vice leverage stabilizing forces that are natural to the indigenous population. While some of these artificial militias may die off once money stops, it is certainly possible that some—having received some training and some arms—may wish to exploit locals and cause instability lastingly. In conclusion, those indigenous tribal militias that are, conversely, self-motivated and working towards their own goals may be one of the most stabilizing phenomena of this counterinsurgency.

#### **8.4 Future Studies of Anti-Extremist Movements**

However, even if similar themes of self-reliance against violent extremist presence play out in other Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan and perhaps throughout the world, Marjah is still unique. However, NATO stabilization mission and the activities of violent extremists found in Marjah are not. Therefore, there may be some commonalities to other case studies. According to the President of the United States and numerous reports from top U.S. military commanders and staff, the U.S. military and partner civilian agencies will continue to counter violent extremism for decades to come.<sup>877</sup> While in the case of Marjah, the ground forces in and around the village elected, despite doctrine to the contrary, a minimalist approach to enable local resilient actors, future operators will unlikely have the luxury of choice. Amidst budget cuts and troop number drawdowns,<sup>878</sup> a light footprint approach to stability operations and counterinsurgency may be the only option for future missions. Even if future commanders choose not to follow a similar minimalist tradecraft that troops in Marjah applied, it is highly likely that U.S. and Coalition Force units will work, or at least interact, with local grassroots anti-extremist movements such as in Andar district

of the Ghazni province in Afghanistan (2012)<sup>879</sup> and tribes of the Anbar province in Iraq (2006-2007).<sup>880</sup> Scholars will likely have many opportunities in the future to study and analyze self-driven movements and the strategies that militaries use to leverage, interact, observe, ignore, or quell.

As the U.S. government faces sequesters, furloughs, troop reductions, and budget cuts<sup>881</sup>, U.S. troops and civilians conduct low-cost and light-foot-print contingency, intelligence support, logistical support, foreign-internal-defense training, stabilization, or counterterrorism missions from the Philippines to Pakistan to Yemen to Mali.<sup>882</sup> With minimum small-purpose military footprint<sup>883</sup> the United States will intend to defeat violent extremists and deny them further safe haven.<sup>884</sup> This mission assumes an end state of local populations' enduring repulsion of violent extremist influence, incursion, and presence.<sup>885</sup> Although unstated in military and executive-level reports in the United States government, these goals assume that local actors and communities may play a some sort of role in enduringly keeping out violent extremists from areas so that there is not a requirement for U.S. troops to remain in countries as was done in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While the U.S. military numbers dwindle and number of missions increase, violent extremist cells—whether al-Qa`ida inspired, bred, branded, or similar in outlook—continue to aspire to regional and global reach and impact.<sup>886</sup> They continue to be relevant and will likely offer opportunities to study anti-radical movements. Violent extremists threaten regional stability, partner nations, and the U.S. Homeland and evidently will unlikely surrender.<sup>887</sup> Becoming more decentralized, independent, self-sufficient, fluid, flexible, and resilient, these groups are continuously learning from tactical defeats. From Southeast Asia to West Africa<sup>888</sup>, violent extremists exploit unstable areas where traditional governance has broken down or where schisms persist between formal national governments and natural local governance systems—exploiting and exacerbating sources of instability.<sup>889</sup> This phenomenon has allowed violent extremists to double geographic breadth in the past five years alone.<sup>890</sup>

Thus the next decade will offer researchers ample opportunities to study indigenous anti-extremist movements as they unfold. While historical accounts and interviews with those involved after movements end will offer scholars perhaps reflective

perspectives, many involved in such movements will be killed with nothing to share. In addition, in some tribal areas and villages, there are few written accounts of motivations and the greater context around uprising. Although there are plethora of methods to study a historical event, the approach in this case study—of obtaining first-hand accounts of an uprising as it was in its throes—has the advantage of direct observations, recording accounts of fighters and leaders that may very well die well before the movement ends, and receiving perspectives without the lens and judgment that may accompany any historical account. Future studies, therefore, may be wise to find ways to uncover narratives during a movement as they perhaps compare and contrast to the findings of this case study that self-determination chiefly motivated those who elected to kill and die to defeat violent extremists. Alternatively, perhaps the more discreet motivations of security, education, nationalism, and a moral, spiritual, and national antipathy toward violent extremism may prove more appropriate comparison for forthcoming analysis of other regions as well as perhaps Marjah again. Either way, this case study may be useful as a first look of a burgeoning discreet discipline.

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The following are some restraints on surveys in Afghanistan writ large

- Secure areas may allow people to feel that they can speak more freely to criticize ANSF, GIROA, security, and other matters. Thus secure and relatively stable areas may seem to harbor the strongest grievances.
- Insecure areas may keep locals from answering questions out of fear of Taliban retribution. Those that speak in insecure areas may taper their answers out of fear—causing, perhaps, some level of social desirability bias. Thus insecure and unstable areas may seem to harbor the fewest grievances.
- Those with access to media may speak about their opinion on their perception of Afghanistan writ large vice their own community independent if the question is about the community or not. Respondents may taint their answers with countrywide opinions.
- Operations, ANSF recruitment spikes, ISAF surge, new ISAF presence, new ANSF presence, and changes of disposition of other security actors may alter people's perceptions on security and governance. Third party activity will affect answers.
- The presence of ISAF—becoming targets and also targeting insurgents—may increase the feeling of insecurity that may not exist in transitioned areas and Taliban strongholds. ISAF presence may lead to an increase collateral damage.
- An estimated 97.5% of Afghan households will unlikely be surveyed due to insecurity and terrain.<sup>184</sup> Thus sample sizes may be highly unreliable. Surveys in insecure areas "demand that special consideration be given to ensuring that both researchers and research subjects are not put at risk"<sup>184</sup> which may undermine accuracy. Bad sampling will mean un-meaningful results, and in Afghanistan most persons are not surveyed due to dangerous environs and remoteness. Such convenience polling—only polling in areas, at times, and with people who are readily available to answer questions safely—will harm analysis of the population.
- Villages often have unique ways of describing threats (Haqanni, al-Qa`ida, Pakistanis, Iranians, heretics, terrorists, insurgents, criminals, drug lords, etc...) and may not be able to distinguish between groups. What applies in one village may not apply to another, so surveys at the district and above level may be highly inaccurate in describing the enemy.
- Some villages' respondents will answer "why," "how did this happen," and "what were the events that led to this" differently revealing cultural, philosophical, cognitive, and etymological differences among different villages leading to inaccuracies in polling.
- Closed and leading questions often lead to inaccurate answers whereas open questions and discussions play into the long and rich narrative tradition. Often interviews lead to respondents speaking about important matters not thought of when designing the initial questions, or respondents take time getting to the point of a particular question. Open questions are culturally appropriate.
- If the surveyor does not understand the local dialect, there may be important nuances lost in translation during introductions and surveys.

- Independent of how a surveyor introduces the survey, respondents may believe that answers could lead to development projects—especially in light of military maneuver and civil affairs unit’s tactical conflict surveys, which sometimes lead eventually to activities. Thus answers may be tainted by personal agendas.
- Independent of how a surveyor introduces the survey, respondents may believe that ISAF/GIRoA/intelligence may read answers and judge respondents negatively. Thus answers may be tainted.

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## Appendix A.

The core research comprised interviews with over one-quarter of Marjah's *arbakai* to include its top leaders and deputies between May and September of 2011. As much as possible, the interview strategy applied survey standards such as random samples, careful translation of questions, word appropriate questions for Marjah, and a large sample size. The goal was to collect professed aspirations, identities, goals, fears, motivations, and thoughts on the Taliban as the fighters were serving actively in the militia. Open questioning was therefore paramount to hear fighters' numerous competing ideas that may include themes and ideas not covered in the literature review or initial research.

The study employed some survey best practices so that interview results would be representative of local perspectives. The interviews targeted adult males, who voluntarily combat violent extremist elements, to find out what motivations initiate and sustain its members and communities. Stratified sampling (breaking up the target group into separate cells such as female fighters and elderly fighters) was unnecessary since village militia members are male and typically between 18-35 years old. The oral survey included 113 militiamen out of a total of an estimated 400 civilian fighters, over 25 per cent of the study's target population—a sufficiently large number to minimize sampling error. To avoid judgment, convenience, or cluster sampling, the interview strategy broke the targeted community into 20 geographic areas and randomly surveyed fighting age males from each area. These locations included government centers, supply points, households, *arbakai* checkpoints, and streets. In conclusion, the study used a large sample size, and each militia member had a reasonably equal opportunity of being selected.

The interviews included the following questions (the numbers correspond to the numbered answers below):

- 1) Why do you oppose violent extremism?
- 2) What were the events that led up to your opposition to violent extremism?
- 3) What are the main reasons your tribe/village opposes violent extremism? Why?
- 4) How long are you willing to oppose violent extremism? Why?

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- 5) Will your sons oppose violent extremism? Why?
  - 6) What is the religion of the Taliban?

Respondents rarely answered questions directly and did not tell linear stories. Sometimes after the last question, perhaps feeling the interview was finishing, they would add in rich stories and analogies pertinent to earlier questions. What was recorded, per participant, was essentially one single nonlinear storyline that did not abide by the structure of the questions. So when analysing the statements, use was made of the entire story. The questions ended up serving at-times as signposts and inspiration for emotional stories, descriptions of events, and streams of consciousness that were master messages for each participant

A challenge to this interview scheme was estimating the total sample size. There are the number of arbakai members whom the U.S. Department of Defense pay, the number of members that arbakai leaders claim, and the number of arbakai that NATO advisors estimate. The estimates of size changed several times per month in the spring and summer of 2011. Such changes in estimates were sometimes due to changes in NATO funding and programming (allowing for over 1,300 militiamen before the interviews began dwindling down to 800 and then 400 later in 2011); occasional accidental or natural deaths, assassinations, injuries, retirements; and migration by some to the formal Afghan government army or police.<sup>890</sup> Additionally, this study focuses on the village proper of Marjah, not those militiamen in the “village” of Sistani; the desert outskirts to the north, south, and east; or the Afghan Local Police in Nad Ali (the formally recognized incorporated district in which the village and unincorporated agricultural district of Marjah reside). The estimated total as the final formal NATO count in 2011, in this study’s areas of interest, was 400.<sup>890</sup>

It should be reemphasized that appropriate ethical restraints kept this researcher from providing identity information for any interviewee except for those three individuals mentioned in chapter seven—whose identities are well known to local and international press and whose interview answers jibed with their quotations in numerous news outlets. The reason for this restraint is to avoid the potential for the Taliban to use this study for possible future retribution or Taliban court arraignment of this study’s subjects. The Taliban and other violent extremist organizations have

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used Western publications in the past to judge against civilians. Even providing just the date, bloodline tribal affiliation (even if this identity is not primary to most citizens of Marjah), and specific location (such as block name or grid coordinates) of each interviewee could easily provide the Taliban ample information to identify individuals or (even falsely) accuse specific militiamen if there is a Taliban resurgence in Helmand. Although more identity information could lead to interesting appendices of analyses on lesser important identities or the differences of opinions in separate blocks, recording or divulging such information would put the interviewees at risk. Even if this study remains only in scholar's hands, there is no certainty that the Taliban or its sympathizers in the West would not be able to gain access to it through subversive means. King's College London's ethical parameters are absolutely appropriate for this study, as this researcher has observed violent extremist use of Western studies (that provide identity information) to conduct retribution against populations.

The following are summarized paraphrases of answers to the interview questions in Marjah from 2011. The location, names, titles, and dates are not given in-line with ethical guidelines. Furthermore, I will not ascribe other labels to respondents so that readers may not misinterpret the paraphrased transcriptions as anything else but in random order, and so that readers may not link answers to exact locations, identities, or exact days and times (except for the number atop each answer set—each indicating a different individual). The numbers to the left of answers only indicate the question asked as described in the chapter on methodology. When reading responses, readers are reminded that answers are often given in open narrative form and often appear not to correspond to the interview questions.

1

- 1) The Taliban are not educated. They have no understanding of anything intellectual nor have they attended any accredited schools or universities. The Taliban is the enemy of all of Afghanistan. The entire land. I am the enemy of all Taliban. I am the enemy of each of them. The Taliban does not allow us to build schools and clinics. They do not allow us to go to school, better ourselves, and receive education and enlightenment. They get in the way of what we want. We want schools, and they not only look down on this but they had gone out of

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their way to stop us from being educated. They do not even allow the young people to be educated.

- 2) The Taliban put a roadside bomb in my community mosque and also in my compound. The Taliban have also worn clothes of a soldier to trick us and not let us know his true identity. The Taliban soldier tricks us to kill innocents. To kill us when we have not done anything.
- 3) All the people of the Taliban and others fought in the civil war for 20 years. And Taliban then, like now, want first to fight and then to take over. I must defend my village, my country, and my family. We must stop their fighting and not allow them to take over this town again.
- 4) I will fight Taliban forever unless they become educated and want to join society. Then I will allow them to return into the fold. Otherwise, they will continue to be our enemy. And as long as they are our enemy, I will continue to fight them.
- 5) My son, my wife, and everyone want to fight the Taliban because the elder says to do so. And if the elder says something, then they do it. I am the elder for my area, and the people around me think like me and follow my direction as I suggest.
- 6) No answer.

2

- 1) Taliban are destroying our country. The Taliban really equal destruction and nothing constructive. They only want to wreck my country. They come from Pakistan mainly, as well as get help from Iran. They also want to destroy our infrastructure. They want us to be destroyed from the inside out. From schools to roads to clinics, the Taliban only want conflict. They only want war.
- 2) Taliban do not allow people in schools, and have put IEDs in schools and clinics. They do not want Afghanistan to improve. They do not want individuals to improve their lives nor do they want us as a society to improve ourselves.
- 3) We want to fight all the Taliban because they do not have constructive policies. The Taliban do not want peace. They do not work for anything good or positive. They bring conflict, and we must stop this. We must stop their destruction.
- 4) We will offer peace with the Taliban first, and if they do not want it is a good thing for us to fight all of the Taliban. As long as they stay outside society and only want conflict, they will be the enemies of Afghanistan. And as long as they are the enemies of Afghanistan, we will fight them continuously. There is no end, for me or for my children, as long as the Taliban seek only destruction.
- 5) Yes.
- 6) No answer.

3

- 1 The Taliban do not want peace. Also, Taliban do not want schools or roads or to improve Afghanistan. They bring only war and conflict. They do not want us to live together peacefully. They do not want us to improve as a society.
- 2 It is therefore necessary for us to fight the Taliban. We must fight the Taliban. This is necessary. This has to happen. Also, Pakistan supports the Taliban to disturb Afghanistan. The weapons are from Pakistan, and the Taliban are

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mostly outsiders so we can recognize them. We know when someone is not from our block. We know when someone from Pakistan is walking around amidst our homes.

- 3 In Afghanistan there are two types of people: The majority who want peace, schools, and clinics. And then there are the others who take the side of the Taliban. It is this second group who is wedded to fighting and misery—who do not join the police, who do not want to be self-sufficient, who do not want to improve our communities. We ought to speak with the Taliban and show them the positive and constructive progress of Afghanistan. To invite them to join society—show them schools and clinics and the importance of families, children, and babies. Perhaps they will not fight if they see all this. Perhaps they could not fight after seeing this. But if they fail to change then we must fight the Taliban.
- 4 We must fight the Taliban for a long time because they are likely bent on fighting the entire Afghan people. They appear, in reality, to want to fight everyone inside Afghanistan for quite a while. So we will have to fight if they never want peace.
- 5 My son and my daughter go to school. The Taliban would never allow them to do this. So it is ingrained in their mind to be against the Taliban at a very young age. They hate the Taliban. Children want something that the Taliban would fight to deny.
- 6 No answer.

4

- 1) While the Taliban do not allow schools and clinics, Afghans wish for good productive lives. Afghans want ways to improve ourselves—our bodies and our minds and our society. The Taliban never want us to improve ourselves. They only bring conflict.
- 2) The Taliban destroy this country. They aim to destroy our villages and cities. This defines who they are, and explains why we fight the Taliban. And it is Pakistan that makes it this way. Pakistan taught them to make and lay IEDs in Afghanistan.
- 3) Mostly Afghanistan opposes the Taliban. But in addition to those against the Taliban there are some neutral and some pro-Taliban elements of Afghan society.
- 4) We must totally destroy the Taliban from Afghanistan.
- 5) Yes. My children are all young and already hate the Taliban because the Taliban do not want Afghanistan to be a peaceful place.
- 6) No answer.

5

- 1) The Taliban do not want peace—nor do they want schools and clinics.
- 2) Only because of my hatred for the Taliban did I approach the Marines to help out my block security forces.
- 3) The majority of people oppose the Taliban, but some who have relatives in the Taliban are for the Taliban.
- 4) I will always oppose the Taliban because they come from Pakistan.
- 5) Yes. My son goes to school, and the Taliban would never allow this. He understands this.

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6) No answer

6

- 1) Before the Taliban, the block elder would solve all the local problems for the people. But when the Taliban came, they arrested people, handed out bread, and taxed locals—to control the populace without any regard for the traditional leadership. The Taliban asked me to join them, and I said no. They killed people. They destroyed a bridge. They destroyed my village. So I took up my gun and fought the Taliban. And I swear my opposition to the Taliban with my gun. My gun is my oath. The Taliban are against peace, and we are against the Taliban.
- 2) The Taliban are against peace and security. They are the enemy. They only want insecurity and conflict. This is what they have brought and want to bring again.
- 3) All people here want the Taliban destroyed. The locals around here want security and peace.
- 4) As long as the Taliban are unable or unwilling to be educated to be allowed back into society, then we will fight them.
- 5) Yes. All people here oppose the Taliban to include all kids. We are all against the Taliban—children and adults alike.
- 6) No answer

7

- 1) I am against the Taliban because they destroyed schools and bridges and did not want peace. They only bring destruction and war.
- 2) The Taliban kill innocents. They killed my son with 200 bullets into his body. You have to understand that fighting the Taliban is my own idea. This is not me going along with the ideas of the Marines or the Afghan government. This is my own plan, my own idea, and my own initiative. They only kill innocent people. One week ago they killed a soldier. This soldier was innocent. This soldier did nothing to deserve to be killed. This soldier did not destroy homes and kill children.
- 3) Everyone who lives here in Marjah, and all of Helmand hates the Taliban. The Taliban do not want Afghanistan to improve. The Taliban only want war. They bring only fighting. They offer nothing for us to improve.
- 4) We will fight the Taliban for a long, long time. The Taliban have only two options. Either they can join society, or we will kill them all.
- 5) My children are all against the Taliban, because my kids want peace. I talk to them every day about the Taliban. My children do not want fighting and seek only peace, education, and schools.
- 6) The Taliban are of a different religion. Islam does not allow people fighting each other. Islam does not allow destroying bridges. Islam does not allow blood. Islam is good. It is peaceful. It is humanitarian. The Taliban abuse Islam. The Taliban are not Muslims. They are illegitimate Muslims. They do not rate to be part of Islam. The Afghan people are Muslim. Taliban are not Muslims. Muslims do not kill innocent people.

8



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- 1) Because the Taliban do not want security. They do not want to improve Afghanistan. They offer nothing by destruction. They are cowards. They are backwards.
  - 2) That Taliban take everyone hostage. Every person hostage. In Marjah they only allowed people to grow poppy. SO, WE ROSE UP AGAINST THE TALIBAN. We do not allow Taliban in my block. I will not allow Taliban in MY country. I PUNCH THE TALIBAN IN THE FACE. MY AK IS MY OATH. What other type of promise—what other type of oath—could be more certain.
  - 3) In Marjah, people generally want peace. Just 10% want to help the Taliban. The other 90% want peace.
  - 4) If the Taliban want to join society then fine. If they want to reintegrate, that is okay. But if not, then I will fight the Taliban for the rest of my life. I will never allow, while alive, the Taliban to come into my community.
  - 5) My son, who is only 7 years old, already says he wants to fight the Taliban on the frontlines. He raises his arms up like he is holding a weapons and says he really want to fight on the front right now.
  - 6) The Taliban are not Muslims. They are terrorists. The Taliban defame Islam. They are against Islam. Islam is a good religion. Islam knows good. Islam wants peace—as most people in Marjah want peace and are good Muslims.

9

- 1) I lost my son and lost much of my family to the Taliban. I am 55 years old and oppose the Taliban. I will never willingly allow the Taliban back into Marjah. This I swear.
- 2) The reason is that Islam does not allow Muslims to kill innocents. And the Taliban kills Muslims and everyone. Everyone is innocent. Everyone is neutral. No matter your religion. And Islam does not allow killing—especially killing of innocents.
- 3) Afghanistan does not want Taliban, nor does Afghanistan want the Taliban culture. The Taliban are from Pakistan, and Pakistan is the source of the Taliban. The Afghan Taliban are not strong. All misery is due ultimately to Pakistan. Pakistan creates the suicide bombers. It is Waziristan from where they come. That is where most of the Taliban are. They do not want security or peace. Like in Pakistan, where there is no peace and security, the Taliban want Afghanistan to be the same thing. They want a place and a culture of fighting. And Afghanistan will not want to lose its culture. And the Taliban will interfere with our culture.
- 4) We must talk with the Taliban and see if they will join the government. We must teach them and make them realize that life is good, and they can join society. If the Taliban do not want this—if they do not wish to rejoin society—then the Afghans will fight the Taliban and fight them for however long is necessary.
- 5) My sons, local children, and everyone around here hate the Taliban. My sons go to school, but the Taliban would never allow this. And this fact upsets my children. My children, like the other children around here, are keenly aware of this. And are upset about the Taliban for this reason.

10

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- 1) I oppose the Taliban because the Taliban are the enemy of Afghanistan. They are the enemy of all our people and everything that Afghanistan means. They hate Afghanistan. They hate the way we live.
  - 2) The Taliban kill innocents everywhere. They do not kill soldiers. They kill innocents, women, and kids. This is what they do. This is who they are. I do not want Taliban in Marjah.
  - 3) The Taliban in Afghanistan are uneducated. They are ignorant. They don't understand what they are doing. And it is Pakistan and Iran who take the side of the Taliban in Afghanistan.
  - 4) I will fight the Taliban for a long time. It would be good if the Taliban joined society. But if they do not do this, then I will fight. I will clear Afghanistan of all Taliban.
  - 5) All kids oppose the Taliban. The kids and even the women know Taliban are not good.
  - 6) The Taliban do not represent Islam. They are not Muslims. We are Muslims. Their actions are illegal within Islam. Suicide bombers are illegal. Cutting off heads is illegal. These actions are unsanctioned in Islam.

11

- 1) I oppose the Taliban because they get support and supplies from Pakistan. Pakistan is a big enemy. I do not want outsiders to interfere here.
- 2) The Taliban are here. Some help them. The Taliban do not have any good ideas. They just kill people and grow poppy. All the people do not want the Taliban.
- 3) In this district, the Taliban kill innocents. The Taliban do not allow school, but our government provides schools, clinics, and mosques.
- 4) If the Taliban joined the community, then no there is no problem. But if they continue to oppose the government, then we will fight until we have completely removed the Taliban.
- 5) 100% yes. People know that the Taliban are terrorists.
- 6) The Taliban are Muslim in name only. They kill people, cut off people's heads and not allow Islam. Just by praying does not make you a Muslim.

12

- 1) The Taliban are an atrocity. They kill innocents.
- 2) The Taliban are dangerous. They are a big problem. The Taliban want to occupy this land. They would bring terrorists like before. They would be a shelter for terrorists.
- 3) The Taliban are cruel. All the people know this. All communities, all Afghans, and those in Marjah and Helmand know this.
- 4) Unless we can make Taliban like human beings, we will not allow them to come here. We will fight or educate. But either way we will eradicate all the Taliban—clear them from this land.
- 5) The young living under the Taliban take the side of the Taliban against the government. But the very young oppose the Taliban. For example, a couple days ago the Taliban shot two people—killing one and leaving the other injured. We must remove the Taliban.

13

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- 1) This is our homeland, our district, our country. The Taliban are the enemy of our country and my family. I now want to help my family and my country.
  - 2) I want to have a relationship with our people and with Afghanistan and keep my family safe. So I fight the Taliban and keep them secure. During the 13-year war with the Taliban took everything. There was no peace. There was no education.
  - 3) Before in Marjah there were many Taliban. Now we are stronger than the Taliban. The ANA and police and our national security forces are stronger than the Taliban.
  - 4) I will erase the Taliban from the country. The Taliban are the enemy of the country.
  - 5) (no answer) We have schools in the district, and my kids go to the schools. The Taliban would not allow that.
  - 6) Some say that the Taliban are Muslims. But I think they are wrong. On the radio I hear that the Taliban kill civilians, innocents, and Muslims.

14

- 1) The Taliban are not good people. During the Taliban's reign people were jobless. The Taliban only sought fighting in Afghanistan. When the Taliban became the enemy of my family and my country I went to the side of the government to fight them.
- 2) This is my Helmand. And the Taliban is Helmand's enemy. If I see Taliban, I will kill them, fight them, or capture them.
- 3) I am happy for the Marines. Before the Marines came there was no government. But now there is security enough to continue our lives.
- 4) I am happy for my duty to fight the Taliban. I will fight Taliban happily for the rest of my life.
- 5) The Taliban came from Pakistan and then came to Marjah. Before the Taliban life was better, and after the Taliban life is better. Now there is security. Yes, my son will be again the Taliban. But I am illiterate, and I don't want my brother and children to be illiterate. So I will continue to fight so that they can go to school. I want my children to be engineers or doctors.
- 6) The Taliban are not from our religion. I am Muslim. And they are not from my religion.

15

- 1) I am unhappy with what the Taliban have done. The Taliban came at night and just ate and drank everything I had. They are our enemy and the enemy of the country.
- 2) I like our country. And the Taliban is the enemy of Afghanistan.
- 3) We have not broken the enemy. There were robbers in the 9 block area. The Taliban came. Some friend of mine went to fight them. But the enemy was better and better equipped.
- 4) I will help out for life.
- 5) I want to keep the country safe and allow my kids to continue with education. Before the Taliban, children could not go to school. Now they can go to school.
- 6) I have heard that the Taliban are Muslims. But I don't think so. They burn down schools.

- 1) Before in Marjah, the Taliban were here. People were unhappy. The Taliban were not good to the people. Before the Taliban we worked on our lands and helped our community.
- 2) I want to bring security. I do not want the Taliban to come back again. I will fight them. They are the enemy of my family.
- 3) I think the Taliban will not come again to Marjah because the local police were jobless but now have jobs.
- 4) I want to save my family and our district for life.
- 5) Right now I have a weapon so my family can be safe and my children can continue their education. My children do not like the Taliban and think the Taliban are the enemy. They are unhappy with the Taliban.
- 6) I don't know about their religion. But I think they are not Muslim because they cut off the heads of civilians.

- 1) I oppose the Taliban because the Taliban are cruel with people. They kill some civilians, and that is why I have a conflict with them.
- 2) The Taliban do not allow schools and offer no services in Afghanistan. They are against all people. They put IEDs in the roads. This is why we fight and kill them.
- 3) The Taliban are from Pakistan. And Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to improve. Afghanistan is my country. The IEDs are from Pakistan. These are the main reasons.
- 4) The Taliban has calmed down a bit. If they join us, then there is no problem. Then I would have no problem with them. But if they choose to continue fighting, then we should and must fight them until the Taliban are erased from Marjah and from Afghanistan.
- 5) Yes.
- 6) The Taliban say they are Muslims, but Muslims don't act the way the Taliban do. They don't know Islam. They don't understand Islam. The Taliban are crazy.

- 1) The Taliban do not want Afghanistan to improve. They come in the night from Pakistan and have killed some of the local elders. This is why I oppose and fight them.
- 2) I joined the militia because we help Afghanistan. We bring peace to Afghanistan. We secure the locals. This is why I serve in the way I do.
- 3) People don't want the Taliban. Taliban do not allow peace. They do not allow children to go to school. They do not allow asphalt on the road. They do not allow betterment of roads. They do not allow clinics. They do not allow school.
- 4) We will fight a long time. If they join us then that would be good. The others that do not give up we will kill and remove from Afghanistan. But if they choose peace and join us then that would be good. Otherwise we will kill, remove, and fight.
- 5) Yes.
- 6) Taliban are Muslims. They don't know any better. They are uneducated and unread Muslims.

- 1) The Taliban have not allowed children to go to school. And the children need education. The Taliban do not allow this. The Taliban trained small children to do bad things. So we make conflict with the Taliban and will keep fighting them.
- 2) I joined the militia because they make conflict with the Taliban. In my service, I think of it as the young generation defending civilians.
- 3) Here in Marjah, the Taliban cannot come in. They are terrorists, conduct terror, and cannot come join with the people. All the parents tell the children RISE UP AGAINST THE TALIBAN.
- 4) If they do not join us in society in our community, then we will fight and remove them from Marjah. If they join us that would be good.
- 5) Yes.
- 6) The Taliban say, "we are Muslims." But they have come from the community of Arabs and Pakistanis. They are not in a good way. Muslim people are not cruel and do not kill in the way the Taliban do.

- 1) The Taliban are not good people. They came into our compound whenever they wanted. They taxed us. They ate our bread, our lunch, our dinner. They are bad for families and bad for children. They come from Pakistan and other countries so we fight them.
- 2) I joined the militia a couple months ago. Then the Taliban arrested me and tied my hands behind my back. The Taliban hit me. But when they released me I went back to the militia where I have 20 friends to help protect me. The Taliban would hit me three times per day. They did not allow me to have food. They did not allow me to have bread. They did not give me food.
- 3) Our militia needs heavy weapons, and we do not have enough heavy weapons to properly fight the Taliban. They have heavy weapons, and we do not have. The Taliban do not come into Marjah these days. The Taliban are not in Marjah now.
- 4) We have to fight the Taliban until they are removed entirely.
- 5) Yes because Pakistan came here and were not ok with the schools. The Taliban were cruel to the children.
- 6) The Taliban claim they are Muslims, but I know that they are not Muslims. I say they are not Muslims.

- 1) Every one of them came from Pakistan to Afghanistan to fight with the government. They come from Pakistan.
- 2) I joined the militia because the Taliban are cruel over the people. They came into my compound. The Taliban fight and is cruel.
- 3) They hit people. All of Marjah hates the Taliban and likes the militias and maybe the National Army.
- 4) If the Taliban join us, then no problem. If they do not join us that we fight them.
- 5) Yes. Our children do not want fighting. They do not want killing. They do not want conflict. They want peace.

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- 6) The Taliban say “we are Muslims.” But their action is not the action of Muslims. They came from Iran and Pakistan to only fight. They say they are Muslims. But they are only Muslims in appearance.

22

- 1) The Taliban kills people. They mess with all the people and create problems in the community. They come from Pakistan. Pakistan policy is not good in Afghanistan. Every time the Pakistanis fight and create problems in Afghanistan. They are not good for this country.
- 2) (angry, yelling) The Taliban are supported by Pakistan. Pakistan sends in the IEDs and ammunition. The Taliban are uneducated. Pakistan trains Afghans and has used them to put IEDs in the road. The religious schools in Pakistan train kids to commit suicide. The all have come from Pakistan.
- 3) All of Marjah hates the Taliban. The Taliban does not belong. They say we are spying for the government. All of Marjah does not want them. They are not good. They decapitate people. They are cruel. They are especially against all Afghan peoples. The majority of Taliban came in on motorcycles so now all the people are scared of motorcycles. They are cruel, decapitate people, and tax locals. All of Marjah residents hate the Taliban.
- 4) (angry, yelling, animated) We will fight until the Taliban are removed. The Taliban come from Pakistan and Iran. WE SHOULD ERADICATE THE TALIBAN. Their source is in Iran and Pakistan. 50 years ago Americans came to help build Marjah. Now there are problems with irrigation, but this was not solved because poppies require little water, so there was no need to fix this service that we now need.
- 5) Yes. Everybody is against the Taliban to include the children and sons. Everyone.
- 6) (angry, yelling, animated) There is a difference between my religion and the religion of the Taliban. In my religion, there is no killing people. We cannot kill even some people. Suicide is not allowed. I think the Taliban are not Muslims. The laws of my religions and the Taliban’s religion are different.

23

- 1) Iran and Pakistan are the source of the Taliban.
- 2) Because Iran and Pakistan are the source of the Taliban, the United States should block the Afghan borders with Iran and Pakistan, and everything will be solved.
- 3) All of Marjah hates the Taliban.
- 4) Yes, I will fight them until they are removed and pushed back to Iran and Pakistan.
- 5) All the problems are with Afghanistan’s rivals Iran and Pakistan. The main problem is Iran and Pakistan.
- 6) Afghans are uneducated. But some join the militias. THE TALIBAN RELIGION IS TERRORISM. They are not good. They are not Muslims. Pakistan and Iran stimulated the Afghan Taliban. But some of them have become HUMAN AGAIN and are now against the Taliban. The Afghan Taliban are under the Pakistani Taliban. They ARE NOT MUSLIMS. They have a bad effect and are bad men. They affect Afghanistan negatively.

- 1) We oppose the Taliban. They are not good people. The Afghan Taliban are not as bad. They can talk to friends. We oppose the Pakistan Taliban. But the Afghan Taliban are somewhat humanitarian.
- 2) We must clear the Taliban out of Afghanistan. Pakistan supports the Taliban. Everything comes from Pakistan—there is much evidence of this. We must clear them out.
- 3) The Taliban are not good. They kill. They are just in the desert. They are against peace. The United States should solve this problem. The source of the problem is in Pakistan, so the United States should go there.
- 4) Every time the Taliban is here, then we should fight them.
- 5) Our sons oppose the Taliban. The Taliban does not want peace. All the children know this. Everyone knows this and is afraid. We have a problem with the border. The Taliban treat kids badly. Kids want peace, schools, and clinics.
- 6) There are different Taliban. There are those from Pakistan and those from Afghanistan. One type is Afghan. Maybe they will join with us. Then there is the Arab Taliban from Pakistan. THEY ARE NOT MUSLIM.

- 1) I oppose the Taliban because the Taliban kills those that join the government. So I must defend my life.
- 2) (animated, loud) In Marjah last week (town to the east), the Taliban entered by night. They came to a farm and said that the tractors that harvested the wheat belong to the government. So the Taliban burned the tractors and then left the area. The Taliban stated that it was government property. This is evidence for the reason that we fight the Taliban.
- 3) The Taliban does not want anyone to go to school. They do not allow schools or clinics inside Marjah.
- 4) If the Taliban came here and joined us and the government, then this would be good. If not we should fight the Taliban for a long time and ERADICATE THEM.
- 5) Yes. Our sons see the Taliban as cruel to kids. Children hate the Taliban.
- 6) The Taliban claim to be Muslims. But Muslims are not against education. Muslims do not kill. Muslims want peace. Muslims want to be united. God belongs to all people, and never against people. The Taliban are not Muslims.

- 1) The Taliban are the enemy of our families and of our children. They are our enemy so we not fight them.
- 2) That Taliban fight. They came into our house. They ate our food.
- 3) The village is very unhappy with the Taliban. Now the people are happy that the Taliban have left.
- 4) I will fight through the rest of my life.
- 5) Before in Marjah, children could not go to school. Now they can go to school and are happy.
- 6) We are Muslims. We heard that the Taliban are Muslims. I don't think they are from our religion.

- 1) My country and my district should be safe. The Taliban are our enemy.
- 2) They are our families' enemy.
- 3) Our people should be safe. We fought Taliban yesterday and would have killed more Taliban had we had more ammunition.
- 4) I will fight the Taliban for life.
- 5) Before the children could not go to school and were not happy. Now they are happy that they can go to school.
- 6) The Taliban's religion is Islam, we have heard. The Taliban are the enemy. They want to break the Muslims' religion. WE CANNOT ACCEPT THIS. OUR QURAN DOES NOT ALLOW OUR PEOPLE TO KILL.

- 1) The Taliban are our enemy. Yesterday we captured a Taliban commander.
- 2) Now the Taliban are our Homeland's enemy.
- 3) That Taliban are the enemy of our country.
- 4) I will fight them for life. When they kill me, my son will take over and fight them.
- 5) Yes. We should capture the Taliban in Pakistan.
- 6) Around the world there are different religions. And Islam has different sects. Taliban are Muslims, but they are not from our sect. The Taliban are educated in Pakistan. They want to break bridges and burn schools. They are not from our sect.

- 1) We have to fight the Taliban. In our village they shoot the Marines and destroy our homes.
- 2) I wanted to fight the Taliban so I went to the militia.
- 3) They destroy our homes.
- 4) I will fight the Taliban.
- 5) Our children fear the Taliban. The Taliban shoots and causes fighting in every village they enter.
- 6) I cannot believe that the Taliban are Muslims. They get their education from Pakistan and come from Pakistan. Their religion is different than ours.

- 1) Before being in the militia, I was a mason. I joined the militia to fight the Taliban because I like my country and my people.
- 2) I came aboard to keep the safety of my family.
- 3) There is a large distrust of the Taliban. There are some Taliban left but not many here. Last week Taliban wanted to plant a mine. When they were working on it they killed themselves. So there is some Taliban left.
- 4) I will fight as long as necessary to keep the safety of my family.
- 5) Our children do not like the Taliban because I am militia. I also teach them that the Taliban is the enemy. They fear the Taliban because the Taliban has killed students.
- 6) The Taliban says that they are Muslims. I think that mostly they are not from our religion. They came to our village and ate our food. The people were not



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happy. The Taliban is incorrect and not from our religion. They consider the people of Afghanistan enemies.

31

- 1) The Taliban are our country's enemy.
- 2) I like the country so I fight.
- 3) The Taliban are not from our country.
- 4) I will fight. When the Taliban leaves, then I will stop.
- 5) Our children fear the Taliban. They want to continue school.
- 6) The Taliban are also Muslims but don't know about religion.

32

- 1) The Taliban burned down schools and destroyed houses. They fought with the military.
- 2) The Taliban come from Pakistan with different names and break our country and kill people.
- 3) We will fight the Taliban all the time.
- 4) When we had doctors and engineers, they would kill them.
- 5) I love Marines. Marines love our children. Before there was no education. Now our country has education and our country is helped.
- 6) They are Muslims. But they are like children and like crazy men. They don't know much about Islam.

33

- 1) The Taliban do not have good programs for our society.
- 2) I like being in the militia. And the village people love me because I'm in the militia.
- 3) The Taliban are from Pakistan.
- 4) I am willing to fight for the rest of my life. I will fight until there are no more Taliban in Marjah. There are not that much Taliban left in Marjah. Yesterday we tried to capture five Taliban but four escaped.
- 5) Now the Taliban have shown themselves as no good. The children love my (armband/uniform for militia).
- 6) Taliban are Muslims.

34

- 1) When we started to build in Marjah, the Marjah people felt good about it.
- 2) The Taliban are foreign people.
- 3) They will come back and back and strike back and back.
- 4) Now the Marines are doing a good job against the Taliban. If it continues like this, then the ISCI and Marines together will end the fighting in a year. Otherwise without the Marines it might take 20 years. Who is going to take the place of the Taliban? People are not doing everything they could for the Marines. Many people only act with the permission of the Taliban. The good places are under the government. Under the Taliban, the villagers felt bad. People were hurt and scared.
- 5) (no answer)
- 6) (no answer)

- 1) The Taliban do not want security in Marjah or Helmand. They do not allow children—girls and boys—to get an education. The Taliban do not want peace in Afghanistan. The elders wanted peace so they made the decision to fight back and repel the Taliban.
- 2) I heard about the other militias in Marjah, and so I built one too. The Marines do not know who is Taliban and who is not. Our militia knows.
- 3) I began to advise villagers telling them that we need security. We need to build bridges, schools, and educational centers. The Taliban did not like this advice. Most of the Taliban are from Pakistan and have come into Afghanistan. All the people in Marjah are good people and hate the Taliban. The Taliban do not want security. They cause problems with farmers. Before the Taliban we grew wheat. People want education and want to bring security, cattle, and productive farms. They do not want the Taliban here.
- 4) Yes, I will fight forever.
- 5) My children and even wife are ready to fight. We have weapons and a “canon.” If the Taliban come to my compound, even my wife is ready to fight.
- 6) I don’t know if Taliban are Muslims. Most are from Pakistan. Rules in Islam do not dictate us to kill people, to cut necks, or to kill local nationals. The holy book does not allow this. For example, a few weeks ago, an ALP commander’s friend was captured and killed. His hands were tied behind his back, and his head was cut off.

- 1) There are three types of Taliban—they are divided into three parts. There are those that get support from our country. There are those from another county. And there are those that strike mosques, clinics, and everything.
- 2) I work for myself. I love that Taliban that do not touch the local nationals. And then there are those that fight for themselves and cause fighting in Marjah. And then there are those that call for a religious nation under a Mullah. This last type believe that those that help Marines are spies. They do not like those that help the government.
- 3) Some of the Taliban cause fighting and strike mosques, clinics, and everything.
- 4) No answer.
- 5) The children are scared of the rifle of the Marines and of some of the Taliban.
- 6) The third kind only wants people to grow poppy. Their religion is Islam.

- 1) We hate the Taliban. They do not allow education. They do not allow bread to be made or schools.
- 2) If the people stand up then the future will be good.
- 3) Some fight the Taliban.
- 4) Whenever they are off our land, then we will put our guns down.
- 5) We fight the Taliban. The Taliban has no benefit. They strike our schools, don’t allow education, and cause insecurity.
- 6) Islam

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- 1) Most of the Taliban are foreign from Pakistan. They do not want security in the village. They come into our compounds in Afghanistan. When I want something like a school or a bridge, they destroy it. Pakistan does not want security in Afghanistan. Pakistan wants Afghanistan backwards.
  - 2) Security. Security for the village. IEDs are made in Iran and Pakistan. They put them under the bridges.
  - 3) Everyone has made the decision for security in Marjah. Most of Taliban are from Pakistan and Iran. Now they are pussies and can't do anything.
  - 4) I will fight the Taliban for ten years (I will defeat them in ten years). I ask why. Why the Pakistanis, ISI, and CIA comes after us. The United States killed Usama bin Ladin, but the United States does not want to fight Pakistan.
  - 5) When the children grew up, the Taliban did not allow them to be around freely. The Marines and our militia fought the Taliban and pushed them away.
  - 6) I don't know exactly what the religion is. There are the wahabi salafi influences from Pakistan, and the Akhunda (likely referring to Bahai' faith of a low-ranking clergyman, normally a derogatory term) influence from Iran.

39

- 1) Our purpose is to bring security to Helmand, not just to Marjah. I spent six years in Lashkar Gah—I was scared and hid when the Taliban came.
- 2) I had to find a way to bring security to Marjah and made the decision to return to Marjah to plan security and send away the Taliban. I decided to fight the Taliban. I saw one Talib behead 20 people.
- 3) Most of Marjah does not like because they came into people compounds and shops. Now we only hear about them. When the Marines leave the people are not going to fight the Taliban. They are not going to fight alongside the government.
- 4) When the Marines leave, I will not fight against the Taliban. Unless everyone has weapons, in which case I can fight the Taliban for life because we know who is and is not the Taliban. I stood up the ALP because we got weapons from you and the Afghan people. The United States left us alone to fight the Russians. We left. Then everyone came in—Usama bin Ladin, Mullah Omar. Don't leave us alone again. The Afghan government is not good. It is not an authority. Karzai won't do shit. He only talks on radio and the television.
- 5) My wife and my family, when the Marines came, everyone fought the Taliban, who wanted civil war again. Afghans cannot go back to Pakistan and Iran again. We don't want displaced persons again.
- 6) The Taliban has a few religions. They do not pray, and they do not know about God. They are Wahabbi. I don't know much about this. Their beliefs are from Pakistan and Iran.

40

- 1) Most of the Taliban are educated and trained in Pakistan and fight against us and the Marines as well as all of Afghanistan and its militias.
- 2) I signed up for the militia because the Taliban killed Marines and civilians. Why should I stand around? I wanted to help out the Marines and fight Taliban.
- 3) All the people tell me that I have the responsibility—that this is my obligation—to not allow the fucking Taliban in. I will fight the Taliban and send them away.

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- 4) I will fight for about two years. If it is possible to prolong the fight again the Taliban, I will. In my village there is no Taliban. If the village people and government help out, I will prolong the fight.
  - 5) My children are five and six years old. If someone told them that the Taliban are coming they would hide because they are scared of the Taliban. When they grow up, God willing, they will send away the Taliban if the Taliban returned.
  - 6) I don't know exactly. Most are wahhabiya from Pakistan.

41

- 1) (emotional, angry) We must clear out the enemy because the Taliban are not from Afghanistan. They are from Pakistan.
- 2) In the past, Ahmad Shah Masood fought against the Taliban and the tribes. Now the Taliban belongs to Arab countries and Pakistan. We are uneducated, and the Taliban made us drug dealers. So we wanted to form a militia.
- 3) The Taliban do not want security. We must push them back to Pakistan. We need security in all of Afghanistan and Helmand.
- 4) I will fight the Taliban until they are completely finished.
- 5) If you ask my son, he will say that the Taliban are our enemy. The big enemy. People were uneducated.
- 6) There are three types of Taliban. First are the Sunnis in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Then there are the wahabbi. Then there are the Mahdi-an from being trained in Pakistan.

42

- 1) The Taliban are a negative influence on Afghanistan. They came from outside Afghanistan. They want to destroy Afghanistan.
- 2) They detained me after they asked me to support the Taliban—and I refused.
- 3) I helped a former Marine Corps battalion commander a lot. And I helped the people. The Taliban destroyed everything. They did not let Afghans go to school, and they made us grow poppy. They offered us nothing.
- 4) I probably will fight the Taliban until they are out of Afghanistan. I held three large shuras numbering in the hundreds to not follow the Taliban and to establish peace. I would say, “look at what they did to me.”
- 5) I have 16 sons and 11 brothers. I advise them and tell them to work for GIRoA and oppose the Taliban. I tell them what to do, and they do it.
- 6) Their religion is Islam, but they do not act like Muslims.

43

- 1) The Taliban are against kids and against families. They do not want peace.
- 2) The kids want to go to school, and we need schools and bridges.
- 3) The Taliban do not want kids to be educated. They are like wild animals.
- 4) I will fight the Taliban until the area is secure.
- 5) Yes, our kids have to be against the Taliban. They Taliban are our enemy. The Taliban do not want kids to go to schools. They do not want schools or bridges.
- 6) Their religion is Pakistani—Wahabbi.

44

- 1) A few months ago, the Taliban sent me away to Lashkar Gah.
- 2) We returned to bring security.

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- 3) My son and his cousin worked with the Marines to fight the Taliban.
  - 4) The Taliban came here and sent us away. They took everything. I just had the clothes on my body. I was gone, it felt like forever, for seven to eight years.
  - 5) My grandchildren will fight alongside my children against the Taliban.
  - 6) Muslim.

45

- 1) This is my obligation to fight against the Taliban.
- 2) I wanted to figure out how to bring security to my area. So I talked to the local Marine Corps colonel. And I made the decision to stand up a militia. The militias know who is good, who is bad, and who is Taliban. We have been very helpful to the Marines.
- 3) The Taliban do not want security.
- 4) IF ONE TALIBAN IS LEFT, I WILL KILL HIM.
- 5) I'm pretty sure my children will be like me.
- 6) Most of the Taliban say that their religion is Muhammadin. But they are not Muhammadin. They kill locals. In Islam, in the Quran, it says not to kill and fight.

46

- 1) I don't care if it's Taliban or anyone. If there is insecurity—in Afghanistan or the world—and they don't want peace, then I am against these people. I am against anyone in the world that is against peace.
- 2) (NO ANSWER.)
- 3) (no answer)
- 4) (NO ANSWER.)
- 5) I don't know about my sons. They will make their own decision when they grow up.
- 6) Islam. But Islam, the Taliban uses only in name. Islam does not call for people to fight.

47

- 1) Security.
- 2) (NO ANSWER.)
- 3) (NO ANSWER.)
- 4) The Taliban are pussies.
- 5) I have no idea what my kids will feel when they grow up.
- 6) Islam.

48

- 1) The United States needs to talk to everyday to the people in Pakistan who are causing the problems. The most important thing is that we build schools, have educations, and have teachers.
- 2) (NO ANSWER.)
- 3) If we want security and peace, then the children need education. We need to talk to the president of Pakistan. Most of the Taliban are from Pakistan. In the past, your fathers and grandfathers helped us a lot to build Afghanistan and helped with security especially in Marjah. You killed Usama bin Ladin in Pakistan. You need to talk with the Pakistani president, or there will never be

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security. Two years ago I saw a camp in Pakistan for Afghans. I asked the guards why they would not let the Afghans leave the camp. The Pakistani soldiers said that the U.S. president would not allow the Afghan people there to leave out into the town because they could come back to Afghanistan (it appeared that he was referring to bad people, as he was not upset from this story but instead told it as if it were evidence that the source of the Taliban is in Pakistan).

- 4) (NO ANSWER.)
- 5) My children now are small. When they grow up they will make their decision. I hope that the U.S. and Afghan children will sit down and figure it out together.
- 6) Salafis from Pakistan. The United States needs to talk to the salafis.

49

- 1) The first thing is that the Taliban do not care about anyone. They are not good at anything. THEY DO NOT OFFER ANYTHING.
- 2) My people were tired of the Taliban when the Taliban were causing problems. The people did not want the Taliban. An easy way to solve this problem was to stand up a militia.
- 3) The villagers think that the Taliban is not good for families.
- 4) The only way to solve the situation is to keep the people busy (he appeared to be referring to jobs and employment). And then the Taliban would only last about two months. Then the Taliban would be done.
- 5) My kids will be like me. If the Taliban act in the wrong way then my children will fight them. The Taliban want to bring children to the schools in Pakistan.
- 6) (no time to answer this question because a US commander came by and needed to meet with him in private urgently)

50

- 1) The Taliban do not want security or peace in Afghanistan, especially Marjah.
- 2) A few months ago, the situation was dangerous in Sistani. The Taliban put IEDs in the roads and by canals and bridges. I showed the Marines where these IEDs were. The Taliban told me that they would kill me. They beat me and shot me twice in the leg (he showed me two healed bullet wounds on his left calf). They came into my compound and destroyed it. The Taliban do not want security.
- 3) The Taliban are from another country. The locals hate the Taliban. The Taliban would not build or allow us to build bridges, canals, and schools.
- 4) I will continue to fight until the Taliban are defeated.
- 5) I believe that when my children grow up they will be educated and maybe they will fight again the Taliban? Maybe they will follow our rules? If the fighting continues then they might help, and they will get educated. The situation will be better.
- 6) The Taliban are Muslim. But I don't know what's what about religion. The Taliban's religion is the Quran. The says they believe in the Quran. But they are taught in Pakistan and are from Pakistan.

51

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- 1) The Taliban are not good people. They are the enemy of Afghanistan. The Taliban take the side of some tribes like the Alikozai. The Taliban are not good for Afghanistan.
  - 2) I want to protect Marjah, my village, and serve Afghanistan. I am uneducated. And I want my son to be able to go to school. But the Taliban do not allow people to go to school.
  - 3) All the people know that the Taliban are not good people. They do not solve problems. Their courts are a problem. They want people to fight. The Taliban takes one side or the other. They are not a good arbitrator, they do not have good judgment, and they kill people indiscriminately.
  - 4) While I am still alive I will oppose and fight the Taliban.
  - 5) All kids and all in the young generation oppose the Taliban because the Taliban regime are not good. They do not let people go to school. They would today not let children go to school and be happy.
  - 6) The Taliban say they are Muslims. But the Taliban are not. They don't allow Islamic law. The Taliban kills. But Muslims do not want to eradicate people and don't allow suicide. The Taliban joined with the Pakistani people to make those Pakistanis go to religious schools.

52

- 1) I suffered a lot under Taliban rules. The Taliban are not well educated. They are in the hands of Pakistan and Iran who pay them. They are cruel and no one will follow until the Taliban spreads terror.
- 2) They used to kill one person to get taxes from everyone—making that one person an example. And this becomes propaganda that spreads outward. They would make an example of one person for the community over someone who refuses to grow poppy for or give food to the Taliban.
- 3) A person who loves the human race feels respect to do something for that place. He will be loyal to that place. The Taliban made people worse than animals. People were uneducated. So one educated person would come along—if he does something good then this is an opportunity. But the next day the Taliban would kill or kidnap this person. Or he would disappear or flee. Marjah used to be heaven for drug lords, smugglers, killers, kidnappers. The Taliban's main income was smuggling. Shops used to only sell opium. Any program where guns and bullets are involved needs money. They support themselves with drugs, and use this money to kill families and destroy lives. It is money for destruction. These days are like Eid (holiday). Children can go to school. You can see it on their faces. But it doesn't quite feel as good as the early days. After Operation Mosharak, all the shops are now busy, and the economy is booming. Now there are tractors and motorbikes. This was impossible before. Before there was one guy with a tractor on this piece of land. Now each of his cousins has a tractor.
- 4) Before you couldn't walk because of the dust. Now the roads are better. There are solar powered lights. Now the city is calm.
- 5) Before an old person would be beaten if the Taliban needed to collect food from him. Now he can walk and drive and bike around. Before the power was not given to the block elders. They were the most wanted by the Taliban. It was a cat and mouse game.

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- 6) Everyone knows. Islam is a religion of friendship and peace. It is not a religion of f killing someone in the middle of the street. They talk about the Prophet, may God keep him. But Islam is like water. It can drown you or save your life. If someone is already a bad guy then he will twist the truth. Before a woman could not go to bazaar without a man. Doesn't matter if she needs medicine. Now kids are going to school again. It doesn't matter if people are street vendors, doctors, or professors—everyone sends their kids to school and share stories with one another about their kids in school. The Taliban captured Marjah in 2009. And Marjah suffered more than the rest of Afghanistan. So now Marjah deserves more good things for itself.

53

- 1) The Taliban only want to fight. I do not want this fighting. The Taliban only want suicide attacks.
- 2) I am happy with our militia and want to give to our country and our government. I want there to be schools. I am happy with this security. I fought with the Russians as a mujahid. I helped to solve that problem. Before the Russians and even during the Russians people were educated. But after the Russians, people were uneducated as it was through the Taliban rule.
- 3) The Marines are 100% good. We will all fight for security for a long time like we did against the Russians.
- 4) I will fight for life. Even as a boy I wanted to fight. I want to fight and kill all the Taliban. I want to help Marjah and help Afghanistan.
- 5) When my son is old he will be like those in the militias. He likes the arbakai. He will be against the Taliban in the future.
- 6) My religion is against the Taliban. Pakistan and Iran are the enemy. Baazgul, the ALP commander helped to bring me to the militia and will make Marjah secure.

54

- 1) I became an ALP block elder and leader to help my country. Why should I stay at home? I appreciate that the militias were and are helping. I am happy to help and enjoy helping. I enjoy killing the Taliban and fighting the Taliban.
- 2) My father is a malik and was a block elder. So I have followed in my father's footsteps.
- 3) In Marjah, the Taliban caused fighting in the street. So now I have 30 men. Marjah needs ISCI.
- 4) I will not leave the ISCI. We need agriculture and security in Marjah. We need security in Marjah and Afghanistan. We need to have security everywhere forever.
- 5) My son goes to school now. But he will fight the Taliban and help against the Taliban in the future. Today we are teaching the students to be educated and they will learn. And they will learn about the true nature of the Taliban.
- 6) The Taliban brought suicide attacks here. Everyone here has the choice between helping and fighting. And the Taliban choose fighting but should be helping. That Taliban are not like Muslims. Muslims are just. Taliban are not just. That Taliban do not allow schools and are against Islam.

55



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- 1) I am against the Taliban because the Taliban do not like Afghanistan.
  - 2) I wanted peace so I decided to combat the Taliban. My life is now good. This is how I wanted it. Children can go to school, and there is security.
  - 3) The Taliban are against Afghanistan and Marjah culture, security, and education.
  - 4) I want to fight the Taliban for the rest of my life. I will not leave the militia or militia's mission.
  - 5) My son is just like me. He wants to remove the Taliban from all of Afghanistan.
  - 6) The Taliban's religion is not good. They do not think or care about people, women, and children. They are outside the religion. They want to destroy, use bombs, and hurt people only.

56

- 1) Since the ALP stood up I do not see Taliban. The Taliban brought insecurity.
- 2) I am against the Taliban because they damaged my home as well as destroyed my tractors and motorbikes.
- 3) The Taliban are not here now. Nobody likes the Taliban because they now have security and education. People have knowledge of who the Taliban really are.
- 4) I will not stop until all the Taliban are removed from the village. This is important for children.
- 5) I have two sons. They both today work for the militias and will continue to do so.
- 6) That Taliban are not good. They killed a lot of people of Marjah and Afghanistan.

57

- 1) We do not like the Taliban. They do not allow security and are against security, knowledge, and education.
- 2) My life is good, but I need more money. Before ISCI, things were no good. The Taliban were everywhere and destroyed everything for me. They hurt my family and my brother. They came to my family's compound at night to stay in the wintertime.
- 3) More and more people joined the ALP so that the Taliban would not be in Marjah. To drive the Taliban from Marjah. The Taliban came to compounds at night. And they forced us to pay them money.
- 4) I will fight until there is peace in Marjah. Until peace is in place.
- 5) My son will take over the security role to secure Marjah.
- 6) The Taliban's religion is not good because they kill so many people and children. The Taliban are not Muslims.

58

- 1) We hate the Taliban. The Taliban killed my uncle and cousin. I seek out revenge for them. I will avenge them.
- 2) I have to do this because the Taliban are our enemy. If people did not join the ISCI, then this would be bad for Marjah. The ALP is harmful for the Taliban. I want to protect my family, my relatives, and my wife.
- 3) The Taliban annoy people and misuse and mistreat people. They put mines in the road which people walk down and kill people. They beat people. This is why people in Marjah do not like them.

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- 4) As long as I am alive I will fight the Taliban. I will fight in Marjah against the Taliban for life.
  - 5) When my son is raised, he should also fight against the Taliban.
  - 6) They are the same religion as me. They are Muslims.

59

- 1) I was against the Taliban because I worked in a company. The Taliban called me and asked why I was working for the government. I was just working in a company.
- 2) I am now with the government in a war against the Taliban because they bother me.
- 3) The Taliban came into our homes. They killed a lot of people. They took money and food from the locals. They spent one night with my mother and my sister. They did this throughout Marjah.
- 4) I will fight to remove the Taliban. The Taliban will kill me because I work for the ISCI. They will kill all ISCI.
- 5) The TB shot me in the leg. I killed three TB commanders. My son will fight for the ISCI. They will defend my community and my farm. My name means Black and drives fear in the Taliban.
- 6) They are not Muslims. They come from Pakistan, their religion. They kill Muslims in Afghanistan. We are Muslims. They are not.

60

- 1) I fight because I want to bring security to this area.
- 2) The government needs us. Afghanistan needs me.
- 3) Those in Marjah know where the Taliban is. They, and the ISCI, believe that the Taliban is not good. They are not good for families. The Taliban is the enemy of Afghanistan.
- 4) As long as my country needs me, I will serve.
- 5) When my children are older I will tell them the Taliban is the enemy of our country. They are the enemy of governance.
- 6) They are Muslims. But a different type of Muslims.

61

- 1) Because the Taliban were educated in Iran and Pakistan. They are outsiders. They come from the outside.
- 2) I want to help Afghanistan. I feel that I need to support Afghanistan. I want to bring peace and security.
- 3) The Taliban are against the people. They Taliban are against peace. They do not want or allow peace. They are against Afghanistan improving. They do not want Afghanistan to improve.
- 4) I will fight them all the time as long as they are in Afghanistan.
- 5) My children fear the Taliban. They want education. And since the Taliban do not allow education, the Taliban are the enemy of the children here. And the Taliban's enemy is children.
- 6) I don't know. If they are Muslims, then why would they kill civilians? I don't know. I don't understand them.

62

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- 1) The Taliban are the enemy of the people of Afghanistan. They do bad work. They executed hurtful policies.
  - 2) Because I like the ISCI. I will stay with them with their support from our country and the Afghan government.
  - 3) They kill. The Taliban breaks schools and homes. They are against education. They do not allow people to be educated. They burn down schools and mosques.
  - 4) I will fight for the rest of my life. I will serve for the rest of my life.
  - 5) I don't know what my children think right now. I know that they want education—something that the Taliban do not allow.
  - 6) I think that the Taliban are Muslims too.

63

- 1) The Taliban are the enemy of the civilians. They do not like civilians. And they are the enemy of the family.
- 2) I like peace. I long for peace. And want to help Afghanistan.
- 3) When the Taliban came in, Marjah came together to fight them. And Marjah will always fight and be against the Taliban.
- 4) For all time. For all the days of my life.
- 5) The kids do not like the Taliban. They are against the Taliban. They are absolutely fed up with a future that the Taliban would offer.
- 6) Muslims too.

64

- 1) The Taliban are the enemy of the families. Afghanistan is for us. They do not want a better life in Afghanistan. They are against us improving ourselves.
- 2) Because the Taliban do not bring security or peace. They are against these things.
- 3) Because I, and the ISCI, can bring security and peace. We need U.S. support. And we need our ALP commander.
- 4) I am very tired from fighting. We have security and peace right now in our community. But I will strive for this always.
- 5) My children fear the Taliban. When they are older they will be like me. My children like education. They believe that the Taliban is their enemy. They fear the Taliban.
- 6) I heard that they are Muslim. That's what they say. But I don't think that they are Muslims.

65

- 1) The Taliban do not offer anything positive or productive. They do not conduct good policies. They only bring bad works, bad things. They are the enemy of civilians.
- 2) I want to defend Afghanistan. I feel that I have to. I am compelled to—to myself.
- 3) Marjah is just like me. Now we join the ISCI. The Taliban will never be here again.
- 4) As long as there are ISCI. As long as my country is behind me, I will serve to defend Afghanistan.

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- 5) My children want education. They will also help our country. They want Afghanistan to improve. They do not and will not like the Taliban. They will be against the enemies of Afghanistan.
  - 6) They are the same. Muslims.

66

- 1) The Taliban do not like my personal style. They do not like what I eat and drink. They do not like the way I eat and drink. I'm a man. And I do not want anyone getting in the way of me. I do not want anyone getting in the way of what I want.
- 2) Now I am young. I want to defend my country. I have to join the ALP to break the enemy. To break our enemy. To break the Taliban.
- 3) Marjah is united together with the ISCI. When our community is behind the ISCI the Taliban cannot come. All the people like us. And all the people in Marjah are not happy with the Taliban.
- 4) The Taliban are not from Afghanistan. They are from Pakistan and other countries. They have foreign roots. I will be against them and fight them for life.
- 5) My children are like me. They want freedom.
- 6) There are different people with different beliefs around the world. I have heard this, that they are Muslim. But I don't think so. I don't know exactly.

67

- 1) When the Taliban were in our district they brought fighting. Everyday there was fighting. They killed civilians and caused strife amongst the community.
- 2) I joined the ALP because I wanted more ammunition and a machine gun to fight my enemy—the Taliban. The ALP support me in my efforts to fight the Taliban.
- 3) The Taliban are the enemy of Afghanistan. The ISCI and the community will only allow people and government into our district. No outsiders. We will not allow outsiders back in here.
- 4) I will fight until I feel security. Until I feel secure. As long as the Taliban is the enemy of Afghanistan, I will fight them.
- 5) The children want peace and schools. They know that the Taliban are the enemy of these dreams. And therefore they believe the Taliban to be the enemy. They will continue like this.
- 6) I have a lot of examples. When the Taliban came, they fought civilians and killed innocents. The Taliban brought fighting amongst society. Education and peace. This is what the Taliban fight. And they are not from our religion. I have lots of examples.

68

- 1) Because the Taliban brought fighting right beside my home. They brought SHAME.
- 2) I want to help Afghanistan.
- 3) Marjah is united behind the ISCI. Marjah like the ISCI. We enjoy support from all of Marjah. And all of Marjah considers our enemy their enemy. The enemy of Marjah and the ISCI is the Taliban.
- 4) For life.

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- 5) My children feel that the Taliban are the enemy. My child is only four years old, and he already wants to join the ALP to fight the Taliban.
  - 6) The Taliban are not Muslim. They do not share the same religion as us. They come from a new religion from Pakistan. This religion gets support from Saudi Arabia. This is a new belief system.

69

- 1) The Taliban came to our village. They fought beside my house.
- 2) My family had to run to another safe area. And I came back to fight the Taliban to save my wives and mother. For their safety.
- 3) They brought fighting to our homes.
- 4) I will fight them all the time, for the rest of time. I will fight until I am sure they are defeated. Right now there are no enemy present in my block.
- 5) I don't know about my children when they grow up. They fear the Taliban now. In the future they want to be engineers or doctors. They seek education. They seek things the Taliban would not allow.
- 6) They are not Muslims.

70

- 1) Because the Taliban are my enemy. They are the enemy of Afghanistan.
- 2) They do not want a better Afghanistan. They offer nothing.
- 3) I have an example. One of my friends was working for a company. A company that was considered to be under the auspices of Afghanistan. And because of this the Taliban shot my friend in the head. But the Marines came to help.
- 4) I want freedom. And I will fight for this goal for the rest of my life. I am dedicated for life.
- 5) My child is in school. Actually he's in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. When the Taliban came before, he couldn't go to school. The children want peace. They want security. They want to go to school. They want education. Things the Taliban forbade.
- 6) The Taliban are Muslims. But they are different. Different from us.

71

- 1) The Taliban are the enemy of Afghanistan.
- 2) I have to help to fight against the Taliban.
- 3) The Taliban killed my brother. My brother was young. He was innocent.
- 4) I am dedicated for life. My entire life. As long as the enemy is alive—as long as the Taliban exist—I will fight them.
- 5) Right now the children want a good future. They long for education.
- 6) They are Muslims, but they are different now than our sect of religion.

72

- 1) The Taliban are our enemy. They do not conduct any good policies. They do not do good works. I have to fight them.
- 2) I need to support Afghanistan and the government. The ISCIs support the government. I need to support the efforts against the Taliban. I want to help and support my country.
- 3) Before there were more Taliban. Now in Marjah the ISCIs have come together. We do not want the Taliban to come back again.
- 4) I will fight until I truly feel freedom and security. I will fight until this.

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- 5) My children fear the Taliban. The Taliban burn books and schools down. My children want a future of education. They want peace. They will never support the Taliban.
  - 6) The Taliban are not from my religion. We have freedom in my religion. I will not allow them to tell me what to do. The Taliban only do what benefits them. They only do for themselves.

73

- 1) I don't like fighting that they bring. The kill and bring only fighting.
- 2) I want to keep Afghanistan and my people safe and secure.
- 3) Since the Taliban, there has been less corruption now in Marjah. And this has cause the people of Marjah to be against the Taliban.
- 4) I want my rights. And until I have my rights I will fight against the Taliban. I will fight until I feel good and feel freedom. I seek freedom.
- 5) Children know the Taliban are the enemy. An example is when the Marines first arrived, the Taliban saw me work with them. They came to my compound and kidnapped me. They beat me and would only free me for over 400,000 Afghani.
- 6) They talk as if they are Muslims. Maybe they're not Muslims.

74

- 1) The Taliban came to Marjah and brought fighting to our homes.
- 2) We have to fight the Taliban. Our village is unified. They are together. The big man, the elder, the chief, said to go to the ALP and join to fight. He told us to help the people. And so we did.
- 3) We are all together on this. The Taliban can no longer come into our community safely. We can never like them. All the people are like me against the Taliban.
- 4) I will help out. I will fight for the rest of my life.
- 5) Our children do not have good memories about the Taliban. They witnessed fighting and death and the burning of schools.
- 6) The Taliban claim to be Muslims. Maybe they're correct. But they do not act morally. They do not do good works. I do not know.

75

- 1) We are all together in our efforts. If one person acts, everyone else will come to his aid and help. The answer from everyone will be the same. We are against the Taliban.
- 2) It is better for us to support our country and our government. I have to come here and help. I propelled to be here.
- 3) We were not free when the Taliban were here. They were actually in our very own homes often. We were happy for the Marines and the government. All of Marjah is like me. We all want to be free of the Taliban.
- 4) I feel good now that we have security. I want it to stay this way, and I am willing to fight for the rest of my life.
- 5) The children are like everyone. And everyone likes to be free. The children, like all of Marjah, want a good future.
- 6) When the Christians were here, all Muslims fought against the Christians. When the Taliban came here—and the Taliban are not correct Muslims, not

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proper Muslims—we all come together to fight against the Taliban. The Taliban are not good Muslims. They are from Pakistan. They are educated in a place called Waziristan. Do you know this place? Have you heard of this place? They are the enemy of Afghanistan. They are wayward twisted Muslims.

76

- 1) We all know better. The Taliban are the enemy of all civilians.
- 2) The Taliban came into my homes. Men came right besides my home and brought fighting.
- 3) They kill our children. They burned down our children's schools. They did not bring any good policies.
- 4) I am in this for life. The Taliban will be my enemy for life.
- 5) The Taliban burn down schools. They put explosives on other men. Children have heard about this and even seen this with their very eyes. They have seen the Taliban cut off the heads of people. If they see the enemy. If they see the Taliban. They tell me. They report it.
- 6) They are not Muslims. I'll give you an example. They kill civilians. They kill children. Islam does not allow this fucking shit. Islam would never ever fucking allow this. I will never believe that they are from Islam.

77

- 1) We need a better future, and we need education. The Taliban brought a wealth of fighting to Afghanistan. This is not a good thing. We lost everything. They brought nothing positive.
- 2) I fight the Taliban because I want peace. I want a future of freedom.
- 3) We all know that it is most important that we have good clinics, good roads, good canals, and help from the government. When our country helps its civilians—when the government helps its civilians—the Taliban does not want this. The Taliban want nothing good. The Taliban does not want Afghanistan to improve.
- 4) I need to keep the people of this district forever safe. I will continue my efforts for life.
- 5) Our children have seen the bad works—the bad policies—of the Taliban. They know about the Taliban. They want good education and a bright future.
- 6) Muslims do good deed. They want people to be better. Islam improves life. We are good Muslims here. But the Taliban do bad deeds and so they are bad Muslims. They are educated from the other side of the Pakistani border—in Pakistan. The neighbor countries are similar to the Taliban. They are all the enemy of Afghanistan. Our neighbors provide various forms of support for the Taliban. Specifically it is Iran and Pakistan. They all do not want us to improve. They are all against us. They all want fighting. They are our enemy—Iran, Pakistan, and the Taliban.

78

- 1) The Taliban do not allow children to go to school. They destroy our schools and do not let us eat. They kept us from even eating bread.
- 2) I want to support my community better. Our people. The ALP supports the community in this way. Our country needs the ISCI.

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- 3) That Taliban brings fighting. Usually the Taliban comes to fight with the Marines and make civilians get in the way—causing civilians to die unnecessarily.
  - 4) I will fight the Taliban for life.
  - 5) My children want education. Therefore they are against the Taliban.
  - 6) Muslim.

79

- 1) They broke our country. So I will fight them. They made caused many problems for the people. They brought fighting.
- 2) I want to keep my community secure. I want to bring security to civilians and help Afghanistan.
- 3) They did not bring any good policies. The Taliban only brought strife.
- 4) I will fight for all time. I will fight the Taliban. I will fight them until they leave. I want security. I want peace.
- 5) My children are like me.
- 6) Muslims. They use “kalima.” Do you know what this means? It means the words from the Quran. But the “kalima” has words against the likes of the Taliban.

80

- 1) I was injured from the Taliban during my duty with the ISCI. The Taliban shot me with a PKR round.
- 2) When the Taliban came before, they lived in my block. They cut the heads of my friends. I need to support this effort, this campaign, against the Taliban. The Taliban are the enemy of the family, of my family. When they came I only saw fighting in the village. I only say civilians getting killed.
- 3) The Taliban put in mines in the road. They exploded people and killed. They injured civilians. The Taliban came into my home. They are against the civilians. They are the enemy of the helpless—so I joined the ISCI. To defend the defenseless.
- 4) Now we do not have fighting. But we are ready for the Taliban on our block. I feel that this job is my duty. And it will be a duty for the rest of my life. I want peace and do not want fighting. Now I am with the ISCI, I am by my relationship with the government. I am put into the same pool as those that help the government. Everyone knows that if the Taliban capture me they will kill me. So I am happy to be with the ISCI.
- 5) Everything I do, my children will do. If I want peace, they want peace too. If I fight or want to capture criminals, they want to and will want to do this too.
- 6) They are Muslims. But fighting is not our religion. No religions allow fighting. And the killing of people. Our enemy cuts off the heads of friends. And the Taliban gets support from other countries. Everything bad in Afghanistan is from Pakistan. All the suicide bombers are from Pakistan. The Taliban’s weapons are from Pakistan.

81

- 1) The Taliban are cruel. They kill everyone that works for the government. They kill anyone that has anything to do with the any organization that is even related to the government.



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- 2) The Taliban killed my family. They killed them with undue cruelty.
  - 3) The Taliban are so cruel and don't even know they people that they kill. The Taliban are cruel. When they capture people who have anything to do with the government they kill these prisoners in the most cruel fashion.
  - 4) I will fight for the rest of my life. For life.
  - 5) It is clear. When the father fights—that's me—than the children will also fight.
  - 6) Pakistan. Pakistan. Pakistan. Pakistan. Pakistan. They follow a different sect of religion that is based out of Pakistan.

82

- 1) We do not like fighting. The Taliban only bring fighting. They fight with me and my village. They only bring fighting into Afghanistan.
- 2) I feel that I have to defend our block.
- 3) Again, our town does not like the fighting. We need it to stop. And Taliban only brings fighting.
- 4) All the time. I will fight for the rest of my life. I will fight as long as I have the ability to fight.
- 5) The Taliban do not allow education. They are against education. My kids want to be educated. They seek education. And the Taliban would never allow this. It is clear how my kids feel and will feel.
- 6) They are Muslims. But there are some differences.

83

- 1) I have to fight the Taliban. They are not good people. They are against the civilians. They are bad people towards the civilians. I want a free life. We all want to live freely. And the Taliban is cruel and would never allow this.
- 2) I want to help my country. I want to help Afghanistan. The ALP is able to fight the Taliban. So that is why I join them. So that I have the ability to fight Taliban.
- 3) I don't think that they can come to the district anymore. We are all together in our view of the Taliban—in sharing my view of the Taliban. Our town is united in its view of the Taliban and united in its fight against the Taliban.
- 4) I will fight them all the time. Only when they leave, would I ever give up or stop fighting.
- 5) My children feel exactly the same as me. They like education. They want and seek education. They want a better future—which the Taliban, almost by definition—would stop.
- 6) Their religion is Muslim. They get support and education from Pakistan on religion. Everyone of them is from Pakistan. They are heavily influenced by the Pakistan.

84

- 1) The Taliban do not want Afghanistan to improve. They do not want or want to allow my country to improve. So they bring fighting. And so therefore I have to fight them likewise.
- 2) I need the support and ability to fight the Taliban. So I felt that I had to join the ALP to properly fight the Taliban to the best of my ability.
- 3) All of Marjah is fed up with the Taliban. We are all against the Taliban. The do not offer or do any construct policies or actions. Their actions are corrupt and

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bad. Their bad actions include cutting off the heads of civilians. They are very bad all the time. They are cruel all the time.

- 4) I will fight all the time. For all time. We feel in the districts that we do not want the Taliban. When they leave and when we have peace, then I would like offer a different type of help to my country. I am dedicated. I will, at that time when peace is reached, wish to serve my country in a different capacity.
- 5) Under Taliban governance, there was no school. During that time our children fear the Taliban. Our children like education and do not like the Taliban.
- 6) They say that they are Muslims. They use the Muslim religion to conduct bad activities, bad works. They abuse the religions for their bad things.

85

- 1) I do not like the Taliban. They fight near our homes. They kill children.
- 2) Our people support the ISCI.
- 3) Throughout all of Marjah about 95% of people are against the Taliban. They like the security and governance that the ALP help to bring. Only about 5% of those in Marjah support the Taliban.
- 4) I will never like the Taliban. Ever. They are criminal. It is good to have a good government. They kill people. They do not like peace. They destroy schools. They destroy buildings. They destroy things. I will never want the Taliban.
- 5) My children act and do like me. They also do not like the Taliban. They also will not support the Taliban.
- 6) If my beard is not big enough then they would come by and slap me. Just about my beard length. They would come about something so small. Such a tiny matter. And slap me in public. We are now happy that we have the government and the ISCI and the Marines here.

86

- 1) The Taliban are not good people. They are bad people. They came into my home. They used brute force, brute strength to take what they want and do what they want. They used their strength to do what they want. We had no ability, no strength at the time, to fight the Taliban. We could not fight against the Taliban.
- 2) We have to come join the ISCI. They use their strength, so I need the strength to fight the Taliban. I am compelled to defend Afghanistan.
- 3) They use bad works and do this wrongly in the name of Islam. They cannot have this government. And I do not want them to have governance over this area. They just cannot rule us.
- 4) I will fight them all the time. For the rest of my time. I will fight until they leave completely.
- 5) When the Taliban were here before, the children were afraid of them. They feared the Taliban. They had fear. My children want peace and like education.
- 6) They are Muslim. At least this is what they say. But the conduct bad works, bad things. We all know better. Their religion is from Pakistan. Their religion is also heavily influenced by the ISI people in Pakistan.

87

- 1) The Taliban get their support from Pakistan. We do not want Pakistan influence or Pakistan in here. Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to improve. They do

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not want to allow enlightenment, education, or any type of development. They do not want anything positive for us. So the Taliban are our enemy. And we will fight this enemy.

- 2) You know Baazgul? That Taliban killed his brother. And like this, the Taliban killed my uncle also.
- 3) The Taliban takes people and lands away. They want the government lands. They want to take the government lands away from the government. This is the reason for their fighting. Over land. Over government land. It is a contest for land.
- 4) I DON'T NEED A SALARY FOR THIS. I joined the ALP only to fight the enemy. This is my only reason for joining the ISCI. I don't need money. I have to fight them. The ALP is my vehicle, my method, to be able to fight the Taliban. This is what I want—even without money.
- 5) My children are much like me. In their views. They feel that they must kill Taliban also. My children all know that my uncle was killed. They all know about this and talk about this. My children will also kill Taliban when they see Taliban. They will also kill Taliban. They only need to see Taliban to kill Taliban.
- 6) They do bad works by the Islamic religion. They use the Islamic religion. They use Islam for fear. They are not Muslim. And we are partners. If you need anything from me, I can help.

88

- 1) The Taliban are our enemy. They are my enemy. They do not want peace.
- 2) The Taliban bring a lot of fighting. They cause many many casualties. They broke our country. And try to break our country. Crush it. So I naturally joined the ALP of course.
- 3) In the world there are many different kinds of people. Some like fighting. Some like the government. The people that like the government cannot come back here, because of how the locals feel.
- 4) As long as I am alive I will fight the Taliban.
- 5) Even young people, when the children will become just old enough, are and will join the ISCI. They want school. They want education. They want that that the Taliban is against and would not and cannot provide.
- 6) Muslims.

89

- 1) Because the Taliban cannot be from the Islamic religion. They are going the wrong road of religion. The other way, the correct way, is with Islam. They are the enemy of Islam. They are our enemy. They are bad people and conduct bad works, bad activities.
- 2) I do not like fighting. I want peace. If the Taliban came with peace, if they came back into the fold, then I would stop fighting them.
- 3) If people like the Taliban, this means that they have bad minds and bad education. They don't understand.
- 4) I will fight until there is peace, or until the Taliban offer peace.
- 5) All the Afghan people, and this means children included, want peace. No one wants fighting like this. Peace. All the people want peace.
- 6) They are Muslim. But different.

- 1) The Taliban are not good people. They are all about killing Afghan people. They want Afghanistan to fall. This is how people feel.
- 2) I DO NOT NEED SALARE. I only want victory for my Afghanistan. For my country. They kill my family, and they are the enemy.
- 3) I hope all the people unite and people meet against the Taliban.
- 4) I want to help our country. I will fight for all time. For as long as I live.
- 5) My children are the same like me. They do not and will not like the Taliban.
- 6) They say they are Muslim. But they do not know about Islam. They get their support and influence with regards to religion from outside countries.

- 1) Because I want to help my country. I want to help build and improve my country.
- 2) My friends joined, so I wanted to join.
- 3) We want no more Talban. And right now in my area there are no more Taliban. Everyone is like me. It is our duty to see that there is no more Taliban.
- 4) This is my duty. I have nothing else to say than I feel this is my duty.
- 5) They like the military and will want to join the forces against the Taliban.
- 6) The Taliban are the same like me. But they fight with Afghan. I do not know, do not understand, why they want to fight and kill us.

- 1) Because they are the enemy. They want to break the country.
- 2) Because I like the military. The militants against the Taliban, I like.
- 3) I think the Taliban have left the district. They cannot again come here. They have fallen to the ISCI.
- 4) All the time. I like this. I like the ALP and the mission.
- 5) My children like education and schools. They want education. And they do and will fear the Taliban.
- 6) Muslim.

- 1) Because they are educated in Pakistan and Iran. They are against this country. They never want Afghanistan to function. They conduct bad works. They break everything. They destroy bridges and burn down schools to the ground.
- 2) Actually, because I am Muslim, I should defend my home. And the way to do this is with a uniform, a badge, and registration with the government.
- 3) Marjah is better day-by-day. Each day. All people like the schools. And this is not how the Taliban would have it.
- 4) I will fight for all time. For my life. There should be peace. There must be peace.
- 5) My children also like the schools. And the Taliban would not allow this.
- 6) They say they are Muslims. They have support from Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. They do not allow us to improve. They do not want us to improve.

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- 1) I want peace. The Taliban are bad people. They oversee bad events. They are against civilians. They are the enemy of civilians.
  - 2) I have to come to the ISCI. To support the government.
  - 3) Money is a problem. People work for them to get money, and then there is ensuing corruption.
  - 4) We are all an Islamic country. I feel that Afghanistan is an Islamic country. So I will fight for this Islamic country.
  - 5) They fear the Taliban. They want knowledge, and the Taliban will not allow education.
  - 6) Muslim.

95

- 1) Because the enemy is educated and supported and run by Pakistan and Iran. They get their support from those places. The Taliban are the enemy.
- 2) We need in our district help. We need someone to support. So this is why I joined the ISCI. To get the support to fight the Taliban.
- 3) I think that all people share my perspective. They want ISCI here, and all people want to be ALP like me.
- 4) For life.
- 5) My children fear the Taliban. When they are old, they will join the militias or military.
- 6) Muslim.

96

- 1) The Taliban are our enemy. They do not offer anything. They do not provide money for anything positive. They want to break our country. Destroy it.
- 2) Because our enemy needs me. They need me to fight the enemy.
- 3) Over time things have gotten better. All the people united and joined together to help the government. They feel the Taliban are the enemy.
- 4) All time. No matter what. Even as anything arises. For all time.
- 5) They like the government. So they will join the government and join efforts against the Taliban. My children want to be doctors and/or engineers.
- 6) Muslim.

97

- 1) The Taliban do not offer governance. They break bridges and burn schools. They kill civilians. So I want to help.
- 2) One month ago, I joined ISCI. The Taliban are not good people. They are the enemy. So I fight them.
- 3) All the people understand that they destroy. They do not govern.
- 4) I want peace. I would only stop when I feel that we have peace. Perhaps 30 years. Otherwise for all time.
- 5) I think that my children like education and schools—so they will be against the Taliban now and as adults.
- 6) They are Muslims. But their education and support is from Pakistan.

98

- 1) They not only killed my uncle they killed my two sons.

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- 2) They killed my family. They targeted me because I am an honest person living right here in Marjah doing the right thing. They brought this to me.
  - 3) They kill people here.
  - 4) For life.
  - 5) This is clear.
  - 6) They are not Muslims. They do not act like Muslims.

99

- 1) The Taliban are not Afghan. They do not comprise Afghans nor is their origin Afghan in any way. They are from Pakistan. And they are our enemies. Pakistan is our enemy too.
- 2) They are against families. They are against the family—my family and the idea of family. I want to help people. I want to support a constructive society and help my community. The Taliban mean destruction only. They are against the very social fabric of this town.
- 3) The Taliban are our direct enemy. This is clear, of course. When the Taliban are here that means that there is fighting here. The Taliban are fighting. The Taliban mean fighting. They are conflict. If they are here, there is by very definition conflict here.
- 4) I will fight on until I make my country safe and build up Afghanistan. And as long as there is Taliban, they are an impediment to this. It is my duty to fight them as long as it takes and support development and constructive policies.
- 5) My children feel that education is very important. They want education. This is very important for them. They want to go to school and earn degrees to work. They have clear visions for this. They understand what they want from this day forward. And the Taliban would never allow this. The Taliban would never allow education or my kids to go to school, and my children very much understand this clearly.
- 6) They are Muslims also. But they conduct fighting, which is not very Islamic. This is not Islamically correct—to fight. Yet they fight. This is not the correct policy and action for a Muslim. What they are doing is incorrect.

100

- 1) We are peaceful here. We did not bring this on ourselves. We did not ask for the Taliban's invasion and the violence that they brought. We were already here. We didn't go to another country and start fighting there. It was brought upon us.
- 2) I want to defend and live in my village in peace. And since the Taliban mean conflict in our mind, we must fight the Taliban until there is peace. By definition the Taliban cannot allow us to live in peace. They cannot allow us to live without conflict.
- 3) They are not Afghans. Not true Afghans. They are from the outside. Their tactics are from the outside. Their ideals and types of violence are from the outside. They invaded and brought fighting. Fighting is not what we want or asked for. We were not fighting in this town. They came and brought conflict, fighting, and violent to an area that did not want it. To an area that did not ask for it. To an area that did not deserve it.

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- 4) I will fight for as long as it takes until there is peace earned. I will fight until there is not one enemy. I will fight until we have education. I will fight until we have everything we want.
  - 5) They believe that schools are good. But it is most important to bring more teachers. The children want school. We all want school. They can and are willing to learn anywhere. In any building, in that tent, or outside. We just need teachers to teach them. This is the advice I have for you.
  - 6) Islam.

101

- 1) They came into our land and broke into our homes and burned down schools. They essentially broke our town. They came here and brought death. They came here and broke the things in our town. They did not allow education. They did not allow teaching or learning. They did not allow basic school operations.
- 2) ISCI's offer me the support I needed—the support I sought—to do what I wanted to do. They were a vehicle for my own ambitions—for my personal goals. The government offers the weapons and ammunition. They offer the practical materials that I need to fight off the Taliban. They offer the tools for me to do what I need to do.
- 3) The Taliban brought fighting. And they failed, also, to bring any constructive policies. They did not nor could they build up anything or create any type of societal self-sufficiency. They only break and destroy things. And this is very easy for them—to destroy. And that is what they are—breakers and destroyers only.
- 4) I will fight all the time—for my entire life. I am dedicated for all the years that I live on this earth.
- 5) I do not have children.
- 6) Islam.

102

- 1) We do not want fighting. And all the Taliban want is fighting. That's all they want. That's what they are—conflict. That is what defines the Taliban. The Taliban are fighting. The Taliban are conflict. Don't you understand this?
- 2) My wives and girls did not like the Taliban. The Taliban disrespected them and brought dishonor on them, which is the same as bringing dishonor on my and on my whole community. They took and did what they want with them. This makes me unhappy. This is very disrespectful—to disrespect the women of my family. You surely understand this.
- 3) The Taliban would only bring fighting. They could only mean conflict. This is what the Taliban are: conflict.
- 4) I am dedicated to fight and kill the Taliban—all of the Taliban—for my entire life or until they are literally completely run out of Afghanistan.
- 5) My children are the same as me. They will rebel against the Taliban until they are entirely gone. They will fight with dedication, passion, and resolve until the Taliban is erased. Until they are deleted from Afghanistan.
- 6) The Taliban use the Quran. And I use the Quran. I do. I pray five times a day. The Taliban pray five times a day. But they also belong to Pakistan. They get support from Pakistan. They are a Pakistani sect.

- 1) Fighting. That's what they brought. That's what the Taliban are. We cannot have this in our town. We cannot allow this. We did not cause this fighting. Instead, the Taliban came and brought it upon us. They mean violence. And they bring violence right into our very neighborhoods.
- 2) They disgraced our families. They defamed and disgraced my family. I must defend our families and not let this happen again. Never again can they come and do what they did.
- 3) The entire town feels the same way I do. Everyone here, everyone around you here, feels that the Taliban are nothing more than "fighting." They are fighting. And no one here wants this.
- 4) I will fight as long as I still have the strength to fight. I have the will to fight on as long as it takes to expel the Taliban from the country and defeat them. So it is up to the strength and ability of my body to keep fighting.
- 5) The children of the town want a future full of schools, education, freedom, and peace. They are fully aware that the Taliban could never bring these things. Kids know that the Taliban would block any positive and constructive community efforts. Thus, the Taliban, by definition, are the enemy of the children.
- 6) The Taliban appear to follow the pillars of Islam. But then they don't act like Muslims. And their religion is not the same as ours. It is from Pakistani. With roots and influences from Pakistan.

- 1) I want to defend Afghanistan and help the people of this country.
- 2) I want to earn peace in this district. In my district.
- 3) Also the rest of the people here are like me. They feel the same that I do and say the same things about the Taliban that I do.
- 4) I will fight for all time. Until there is reconstruction. Until there is peace. Until there is everything that this district needs.
- 5) My children feel that education is very important. They respect their fathers, mothers, and elders. They will follow in step and wish to keep respecting those that are senior.
- 6) Muslim.

- 1) Now I am one of the unit commanders for the arbakai. The Taliban murdered my father. They murdered my brother. The Taliban did this during Ramadan—a time for holiness and introspection and family. This is the lowest of the low. This is very bad.
- 2) They killed my family right in the mosque. Shame. Shame on them.
- 3) I join for the sake of the district. I looked for a better way to fight the Taliban. And the ISCIs are a better way. They are like me and give me the support I need to fight the Taliban.
- 4) I do not like fighting. I do not like war. But this is necessary because I want freedom. I seek freedom.
- 5) My children think like me now. My brother and father were killed. And they know this. They will want to enter the ISCIs. They want a better life.



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- 6) Maybe they are Muslims? But they get support from Pakistan. They conduct themselves by Pakistan rules.

106

- 1) The Taliban are the enemy. They are the family's enemy.
- 2) The Taliban continue to be our enemy, so I need to fight them. They do not stop yet.
- 3) The Taliban burned schools and broke bridges. I want to create and keep peace and create and keep security.
- 4) For all time for the rest of my life. I will fight until the Taliban are no longer here. I will fight until we have security.
- 5) My children? Of this I am sure. They do as we do.
- 6) Muslim.

107

- 1) I want to keep my country safe—to serve my country. And to build my country in a positive way. And the arbakai allow me to keep Marjah safe and Afghanistan safe—which in turn will allow people to implement positive policies.
- 2) This is the reason that I join the ISCI—to better my country, to keep my country safe, and to allow us to grow as a country and as a society. I have no other reason for you.
- 3) I think that the people here feel the same as me. They want a safe and secure Afghanistan. They feel a need—a calling—to serve Afghanistan and to keep it safe from the Taliban. And it is the Taliban that are trying to get in the way of our efforts. It is the Taliban we have to defend against. The Taliban is our enemy. And safety and security is our most immediate goal.
- 4) I will fight for as long as it takes. All the time. For my entire life if necessary. Every day if necessary. Until Afghanistan is okay.
- 5) My children want the schools. They want education. And they will grow up to help this country. And the Taliban would and could never allow helpful positive education. The Taliban would and could never allow our children to grow up in an education system—to be educated. And this is very clear to eve the youngest of children. So it is easy to understand why kids do not like and will always be against the Taliban.
- 6) Muslim.

108

- 1) Because the Taliban did not allow out children to attend school. They did not want education. They did not want anyone to become better or have better minds. The Taliban came right into our very houses and took what they wanted. They invaded our homes. They invaded our town and brought nothing but fighting and destruction. They want nothing but fighting. They are essentially bringers of fighting.
- 2) I joined because of everything they can provide me in my fight against the Taliban. This is clear. You know this. The arbakai give me the equipment to fight the Taliban. This is why I came to them. It is a personal mission of mine to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban. And this the best means for me to accomplish this goal.

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- 3) The Taliban are our enemy. They are a foreign enemy. They do not have their sources or origins from Afghanistan. They do not like nor allow education. They are against peace. They are the enemy of peace. They only want and only bring conflict where they go. The "Taliban" means destruction. So I fight them. I have to fight them.
  - 4) I will fight them all the time until we have freedom. All the hours in the day and all the years of my life it takes to destroy the Taliban. To get rid of this foreign invading enemy.
  - 5) My children also deeply long for a future of freedom from tyranny of the Taliban.
  - 6) They are Muslims. But they get support from Taliban. They are against us having a future. They are against peace. They are the enemy of peace. And they get support from Pakistan. Pakistan is the enemy.

109

- 1) I want my children to have a good future. I want them and me to have a good life. I want freedom.
- 2) I want peace. I want the things that the Taliban are against. I want the things that the Taliban do not want.
- 3) The Taliban do not allow security. They do not allow education. They do not allow a good future nor do they allow peace. So they are the enemy. They are our enemy. They are my enemy. So I have to fight them.
- 4) I will fight and be against the Taliban until we are free. Until we have education. Until we take everything back from them that they took from us.
- 5) My children like education. They believe school is good. So they will also fight against the Taliban so that they have what they want and deserve.
- 6) Islam.

110

- 1) For a long time they are our enemy. They are the enemy of Afghanistan. They are my country's enemy. They are invaders and bring only death and destruction. We did not choose them as an enemy. They came to us as a clear danger.
- 2) The ISCI's support me with weapons and ammunition and everything I need to fight. They are a means to do what I want to do. They allow me the tools to fight and kill Taliban.
- 3) They are the enemy of all of us. Everyone I Marjah would agree with me. They would agree that the Taliban bring nothing but death and destruction. They Taliban are invaders. They would agree with me that they only bring death. They are the embodiment of conflict and everything that is can get in the way of a peaceful and productive society.
- 4) I will fight until the day comes WHEN AFGHANISTAN IS CLEAN OF THE TALIBAN. I WILL FIGHT UNTIL AFGHANISTAN IS CLEAN. Clean of the Taliban completely.
- 5) I am illiterate. And my children are illiterate. And my children, and I want to be educated. We want education. So the Taliban will be the enemy of us and the children in particular because the Taliban would never allow education. They want us and the children to be illiterate. To not be educated and to not be

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able to read. The Taliban is the enemy of education, the enemy of improvement, and the enemy of children. They are therefore the enemy of us all.

- 6) They are Muslims. But everything they do is not from our religious. They do not act or operate religiously. They get their education in Pakistan. They receive support from Pakistan.

111

- 1) Because the Taliban know that we have projects and good works they are against us. They are against any of our efforts to improve ourselves. They don't want construction. They would not allow development of any kind. They only want destruction and killing. They fight us. They came and fought where we live. We did not ask for this. They came to us and brought fighting.
- 2) I fight because I want security and education. It is that simple.
- 3) They see the village is being productive. And they do not like this. So they bring fighting to our homes and to our fields. And so we are all against their fighting. We cannot allow this.
- 4) All the time that the Taliban are here in our country I will fight them. If they are breathing. If they are operating. If they are physically in Afghanistan, then I will fight them to the death. This is how dedicated I am. Truthfully.
- 5) When they are older, my children, they will have education. They will support and help the government. They will support and help the military.
- 6) They say they are Muslims. So why do they fight us. I do not understand this. Why would they come here and fight.

112

- 1) They are our enemy. The Taliban are the enemy of Marjah, the enemy of Afghanistan, the enemy of our children, and the enemy of our way of life. That is crystal clear.
- 2) They are our enemy so I fight them. So I need to fight them. It is my duty to fight and kill Taliban to allow Afghanistan to become safe and secure.
- 3) We all believe what I believe. The rest of the town, the rest of Marjah, is the same as me.
- 4) Actually this is clear. The children want security. They all want peace. I am illiterate. And I don't want my children to be like me. They want education. They want a good future. They do not want fighting. So they are against the Taliban and will always oppose the Taliban. They hate and fear the Taliban. And as long as the Taliban will be again children fighting and growing and becoming educated and literate, they will support any movement against the Taliban.
- 5) Until there is a good future. I will fight everyday for as many years as necessary to ensure that we have a good future—safe and secure and free of even the slightest presence of Taliban.
- 6) Every religion has different sects. The Taliban are not from our sect.

113

- 1) The Taliban are the enemy. They are the enemy of the family. They do not do anything productive or improve society.
- 2) Before I worked on the land. But after the Taliban came, I was very happy to join the ALP to help my community.

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- 3) The Taliban do not allow “good works.”
  - 4) For life.
  - 5) My children like education. They want to go to school. So therefore they will support the ISCI.
  - 6) Islam.

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